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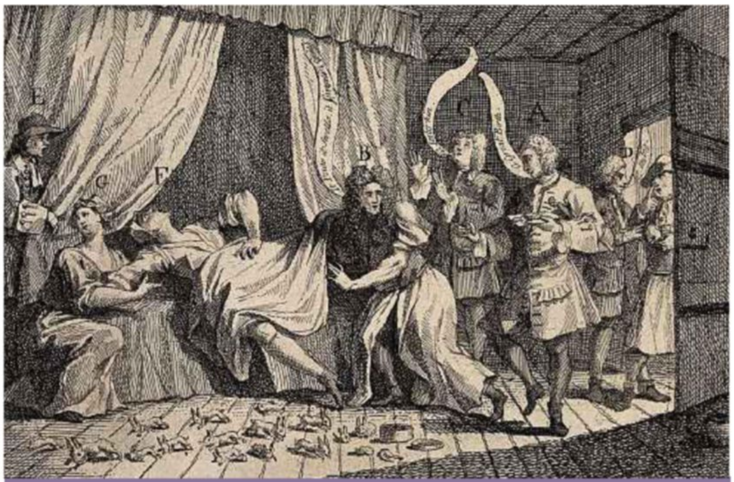

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JUAN BARRETO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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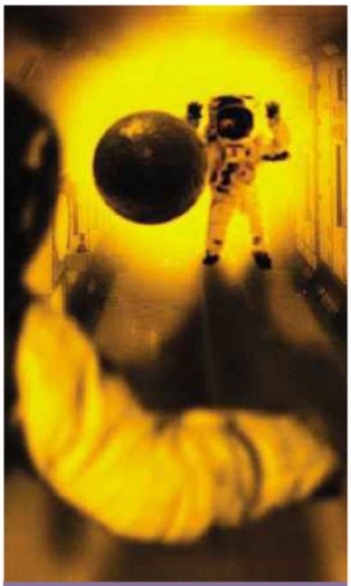

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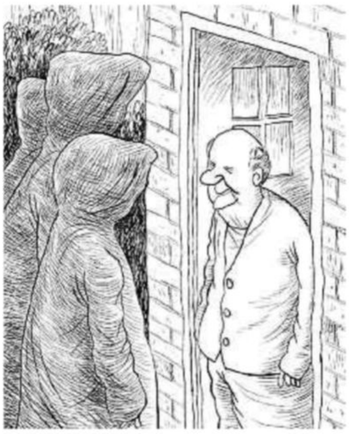
editorial

Lost souls and missing monsters

It's always fascinating to gain some new insight into the landscape of supernatural belief in another culture. We've devoted many an article over the years to the fairy- and folklore of the British Isles, not to mention an equally rich history of ghost and hauntings, but the Spanish – and more specifically Galician – legend of the *Santa Compaña*, or Holy Company, was one we were largely unfamiliar with. This nocturnal procession of hooded, skeletal figures did put us in mind of the classic Spanish horror movie *The Tombs of the Blind Dead* and its sequels, but those cinematic revenants were Knights Templar, whereas the ghostly pilgrims who make up the *Compaña* are restless souls doomed to a liminal existence between this world and the next. Although, in some accounts, their function seems to be that of guides from deathbed to afterlife, you wouldn't want to meet them on a lonely crossroads at night; generally speaking, they are harbingers of death for those who meet them (for a first hand account of such an encounter in Asturias, apparently presaging a car crash, see our *It Happened to Me*, vol III, p148).


"THE HARBINGERS? OF DOOM? HOW LOVELY. FORGIVE ME, DID WE MEET ON HOLIDAY?"

MARTIN ROSS

This issue's feature by Maria J Pérez Cuervo makes clear that while the Holy Company shares characteristics – and possibly mythic roots – with other European beliefs such as the Celto-Germanic Wild Hunt or the fairy abductions of Wales and Ireland, it has a distinct and fascinating flavour of its own, one that derives, at least in part, from the introduction of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory in the 13th century.

WHERE'S NESSIE?

"Is Nessie Dead?" asked the *Daily Mail* earlier this year, worrying that an unprecedented dearth of sightings of Loch Ness's most famous putative inhabitant signalled some cryptozoological disaster. Gary Campbell of the Official Loch Ness Monster Club said there had been no "confirmed sightings" for 18 months (since Aug 2012), while bookmakers William Hill said that the three 2013 entries to its annual Nessie photo competition had been dismissed as nothing more than a wave, a duck and a picture not even taken on the Loch.

A concerned Mr Campbell claims that 2013 was the first year in which there have been no sightings of Nessie since 1925, although early monster investigator Rupert T Gould, in his 1934 book *The Loch Ness Monster*, lists only four sightings between 1925 and 1932. Nessie's entry onto the world stage only happened in 1933, of course, with a number of widely reported sightings (see 'Nessie at 80', **FT308:42-46**). And all this, of course, was quite a long time after St Columba's supposed encounter with a mystery beast in the River Ness in AD 565 – had Nessie perhaps been enjoying the world's longest recorded hibernation?

We'll leave the last word to our old friend Kevin Carlyon, Britain's self-styled 'High Priest of the White Witches, a man prone to waving his arms about at stone circles, clad in his dressing gown: "I personally believe Nessie is a ghost of a dinosaur, who has been regularly seen on the loch. But the spirit of the creature has been so exploited in recent years I decided to carry out an exorcism: hence no sightings of the monster. I will return this summer to lift my spell, and hopefully sightings of Nessie's spirit will return."

D. Mail, 7 Feb; Scotsman, 8 Feb 2014.

ERRATA

FT309:34-39: Ray Stephenson of Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, pointed out an anachronism in the article on St Nicholas by Angeline Adams and Remco van Straten, in which they state that the bishop (c.280-343) "devoted his life to the Orthodox church". As Ray points out, this didn't come into being until the Great Schism of 1054. He adds that: "Saying that the nature of Christ's divinity was 'hashed out' in AD 325 is a rather offhand way of describing one of the pivotal events of Western Europe in the last 2,000 years! Nitpicking I know".

FT311:12: A Sideline headed "Very Lost" reported that a dead aardvark had been found beside a road in Berkshire "5,000 miles from its Brazilian rainforest habitat". But, as Trevor A Millar of Tilbury, Essex, pointed out: "As any fule kno, aardvarks are native to South Africa, not Brazil."

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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strangedays

Pope's blood pilfered

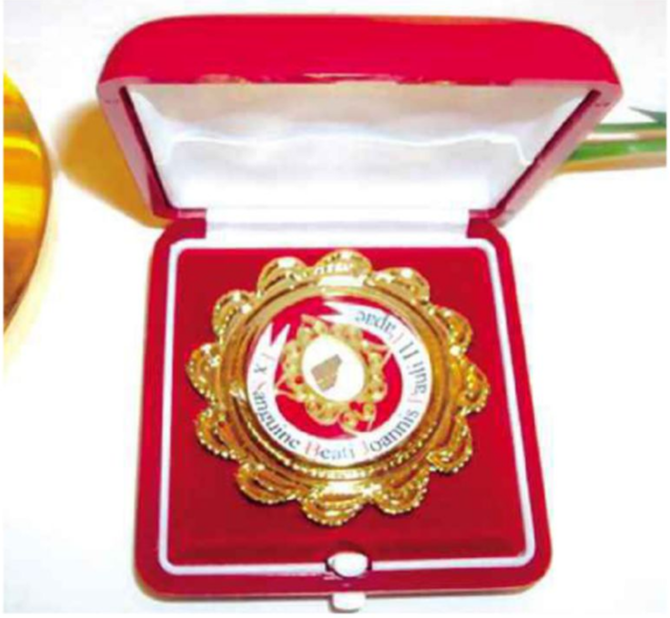
"Satanic cults" blamed for theft of John Paul II's bloodstained relic

A gold reliquary containing a scrap of cloth stained with the blood of Pope John Paul II was found to be missing from an Italian church on Sunday, 26 January. Vatican Radio decried the "sacrilegious theft" from the San Pietro della Ienca church near the Gran Sasso part of the Apennine mountains, where the Polish pope used to hike and ski.

The bloodstained cloth fragment was one of three taken from the cassock John Paul was wearing on 13 May 1981, when Mehmet Ali Agca shot him in St Peter's Square in Rome. It was put in a circular gold and glass reliquary and given to the local Abruzzo community in 2011 by the former pope's long-time private secretary, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, now Archbishop of Cracow in Poland, as a token for the love John Paul had had for the area. It was kept in a niche in the small mountain church, 13 miles (20km) north of L'Aquila.

"It's possible that Satanic cults are behind the theft," speculated Giovanni Panuncio, the national coordinator of Osservatorio Antiplagio, an anti-occult group, who reasoned that such a revered relic would be almost impossible to sell. However, as John Paul II (along with John XXIII) is due to be canonised on 27 April, it is arguable that any relic linked to him will increase greatly in value and spiritual potency.

The reliquary and crucifix were found on 30 January, buried in the grounds of a drug-treatment centre in L'Aquila. Two men in their early 20s, being questioned in connection with another crime, confessed they had stolen the objects and then revealed their location. The relic itself was recovered a day later in the men's garage, missing just a few filaments of cloth and gold thread. *Guardian, Irish Times, 28 Jan; [R] Catholic Herald, 30 Jan 2014.*



SAN PIETRO DELLA IENCA CHURCH

ARTURO MARI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The reliquary contains bloodstained cloth from the 1981 assassination attempt.

> "It's possible that Satanic cults are behind it"

- Eight bone fragments, allegedly from the body of St Peter, were held aloft by Pope Francis at Mass in St Peter's Square on 24 November 2013 – the first time they had been shown to the public. The fragments, each about an inch long, are attached by wire to an ivory base inside a bronze display case, usually kept in the chapel of the papal apartment. They were discovered during excavations begun under St Peter's Basilica in the years following the 1939 death of Pope Pius XI, who had asked to be buried in the grottoes where dozens of popes are buried.

Excavations revealed a funerary monument with a casket built in honour of Peter. Close by, archæologist Prof Margherita Guarducci found a graffito in Greek that read *Petros eni* ("Peter is here"), and persuaded Pope Paul VI to announce in 1968 that the bones had been "identified in a way we can hold to be convincing". Tests on the bones showed they belonged to a man in his sixties, which tallied with Guarducci's claim, but top Vatican Jesuits and other archæologists emphatically disagreed with her. As in the case of the Turin Shroud, the Vatican has an ambivalent view on the supposed bones of the first pope; a Latin inscription on the bronze box housing them carefully states that they are "considered" to be St Peter's.

"No pope has ever permitted an exhaustive study, partly because a 1,000-year-old curse, attested by secret and apocalyptic documents, threatened anyone who disturbed the peace of Peter's tomb with the worst possible misfortune," according to veteran Vatican correspondent Bruno Bartoloni, author of *The Ears of the Vatican* (2012). *Independent, D.Telegraph, 25 Nov 2013.*

PLEASE CHEESE ME
And other tales of sexual deviance and strange desires
PAGE 8

NO NOOSE IS GOOD NOOSE
Meet the men (and women) they just couldn't hang
PAGE 18

LAVENDER CRAB
A crustacean with a most unusual colour scheme
PAGE 21

Animal dopers

It's not just us humans who choose to get high

The taste for mind-altering substances can be found throughout the animal kingdom, from spiders and birds to dogs and marine mammals. Wildlife filmmaker John Downer has caught young male bottlenose dolphins off the coast of Mozambique apparently getting high with the help of toxic puffer fish; they are seen gently passing the fish between them. Experts believe they are using the toxins, which emerge from the puffer fish as part of their defence mechanism, for their own enjoyment. They nudge the fish with their snouts and as the toxin is released into the water, they seem to lapse into a trance-like state. At one point they are seen floating just underneath the water's surface, seemingly mesmerised by their own reflections. They passed the puffer between them for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, unlike the fish they caught as prey, which were swiftly torn apart. The footage was broadcast on 9 January in a BBC1 programme, *Dolphins: Spy in the Pod*. Downer – who has previously used hidden cameras to reveal the secrets of penguin colonies – used underwater cameras disguised as squid, tuna, and even other dolphins. Zoologist and series producer Rob Pilley said it was the first time dolphins had been filmed behaving in this way. "The dolphins were specifically going for the puffers and handling them with kid gloves, very gently and delicately like they were almost milking them to not upset the fish too much or kill them," he said. *Sunday People, 29 Dec; D.Mail, 30 Dec 2013.*

Dogs in Queensland and New South Wales are getting high from the hallucinogenic sweat that oozes off the backs of cane toads, the numbers of which increased during the recent wet weather. Vets warn that some dogs are so keen for a trip that they hunt down the amphibians to stimulate the excretion of the deadly poison, then lick their prey. Addicted dogs could die, or cost their owners a lot of money for medical treatment. Wally, a young dachshund-shih tzu cross belonging to Nikita Den Engelse, 27, of Hemmant, Queensland, is being kept inside after two run-ins with toads and being found frothing and trembling. Jonathon Cochrane from the University of Queensland's School of Veterinary Science said there were some dogs he dubbed "serial lickers" who would be treated for cane toad poisoning a few times a year. "To say a dog or a cat is having an hallucination is impossible, but some do star-gaze to track something across the room that isn't there and others just stare out of the cage while we're monitoring them," he said. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 16 Dec 2013.*

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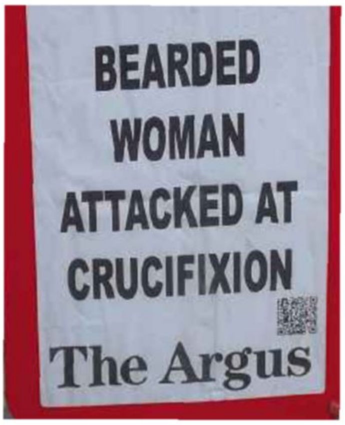
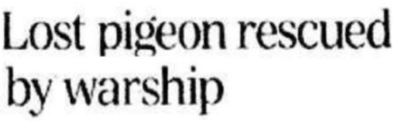


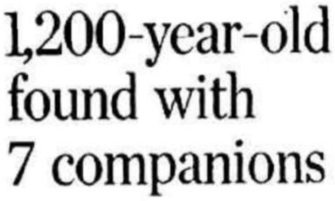
BEARDED WOMAN ATTACKED AT CRUCIFIXION
The Argus

Brighton Argus, 3 April 2013.



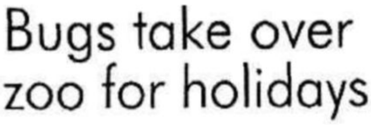
Lost pigeon rescued by warship

D.Telegraph, 27 July 2013.



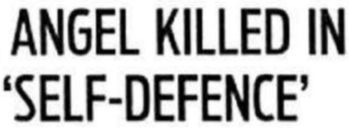
1,200-year-old found with 7 companions

Toronto Star, 4 Aug 2013.



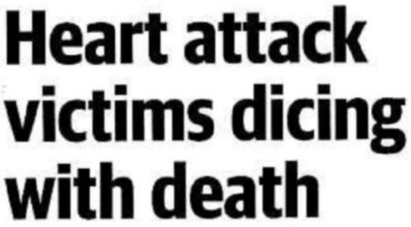
Bugs take over zoo for holidays

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 31 July 2013.



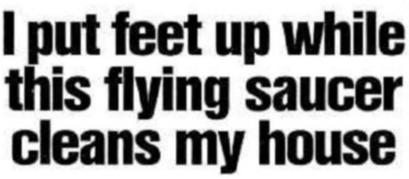
ANGEL KILLED IN 'SELF-DEFENCE'

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 26 July 2013.



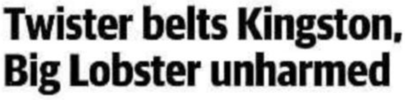
Heart attack victims dicing with death

Adelaide Advertiser, 29 July 2013.



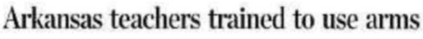
I put feet up while this flying saucer cleans my house

Sun, 30 July 2013.



Twister belts Kingston, Big Lobster unharmed

Adelaide Advertiser, 4 Aug 2013.



Arkansas teachers trained to use arms

Toronto Star, 31 July 2013.

Transplant surprises

You can get more than just an organ in transplant surgery

ABOVE: Connor Rabinowitz, whose heart came from fiancée Erin Roberts's brother

● Connor Rabinowitz from Minnesota fell in love at first sight with the sister of the man whose heart was now beating inside his chest. He was a fit 17-year-old when he began to suffer flu-like symptoms in November 2004. Rushed to hospital, he was told he had a genetic heart condition and would die without a transplant. He was given the heart of Kellen Roberts, who had died from head injuries after a drunken fight in his home state of South Dakota. He wrote to the Roberts family, thanking them for saving his life. Six months later, he visited them, met Kellen's sister Erin, 26, and was smitten. She thought he had a teenage crush on her and was too young to date. They lost contact for five years but got back in touch via Facebook in 2010. They are now living together and planning to marry. "Kellen is always in my thoughts," said Connor, "and obviously in my heart." *MX News (Sydney), 20 Jan; D.Telegraph (Sydney), 21 Jan 2014.*

● A 60-year-old Australian man was given a liver transplant in Sydney in 1999 and immediately developed a nut allergy. The day after being sent home he ate some cashews and within 15 minutes developed anaphylaxis – a life-threatening allergic reaction causing tightness in the throat, severe vomiting, dizziness and blurred vision. Although he recovered, he died two years later from complications caused by his original liver ailments. The liver had come from a 15-year-old boy who had died of an allergic reaction to peanuts. The transplant team was unaware of the donor's condition, which had not been formally diagnosed as a nut allergy. The incident was written up for *Archives of Internal Medicine* in January 2003. Specialists insisted that the chances of a transplanted organ carrying an allergy were extremely small, and only one previous case had been noted in the medical records. *[AP] Melbourne Age, 29 Jan 2003.*

A plumber developed artistic skills after getting a new kidney

● A 10-year-old American boy suffering from leukemia was cured of his peanut allergy after receiving a bone marrow transplant in 2011. He had had the allergy since he was 15 months old; eating peanuts made him vomit and come out in hives. He was diagnosed with acute lymphoctyic leukemia at the age of four. "It had been reported that bone marrow and liver transplants can transfer peanut allergy from donor to recipient; but our research found a rare case in which a transplant seems to have cured the recipient of their allergy," said Dr Yong Luo, who with Dr Steven Weiss wrote up the case for the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. There was a similar case in the UK in 2005, involving a 12-year-old boy, and in 1999 a five-year-old's latex allergy was allegedly cured after surgery correcting a bone marrow disorder. *D.Mail, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 11 Nov 2013.*

● A multiple organ donor with rabies put hundreds of people at risk. One recipient of an infected kidney died from the disease in March 2013, more than a year after the transplant. The donor became ill several months after being bitten by a raccoon and later developed encephalitis. Doctors in Florida offered his organs for transplant without testing for rabies. *D.Mail, 18 Mar 2013.*

● David Waters, 24, from Adelaide, suffered from a stiffening of the heart ventricles and had only months to live. He was given the heart of Kaden Delaney, 18, who had been left brain-dead after a car crash in 2006. Afterwards, Mr Waters found he had an insatiable craving for junk food – particularly Burger Rings, ring-shaped hamburger-flavoured crisps. The Delaney family tracked him down

SIDELINES...

COW BOYS

Raju, a three-year-old calf in Raipur, India, with five legs, was hailed as a miracle worker after 30 pregnant women who touched its extra hoof had the boys they wanted. Raju shot to fame after a woman with four daughters touched the hoof, begged for a son – and later had twin boys. Owner Raj Pratap, who charged 500 rupees (£5) a touch, said: "Raju has a gift". *D.Mirror, 19 Nov 2013.*

ROBOT 'SUICIDE'

A domestic robot was apparently so fed up with its monotonous life it topped itself. The £350 Irobot Roomba 760 – which can clean, vacuum and polish – fatally melted on a kitchen hotplate, sparking a blaze at the apartment in the Austrian village of Hinterstoder. Owner Gernot Hackl, 44, set it to clean up some spilled cereal before switching it off. It somehow reactivated itself, made its way along a work surface and pushed a cooking pot out of the way. *D.Mail, 13 Nov 2013.*

ROO BALL TRADE

As kangaroo numbers explode in plague proportions across the Australian outback, a love potion made from the marsupials' powdered gonads has been branded the new natural Viagra. The Chinese have gone nuts over the tonic, which fetches between £16 and £80 for a bottle of 100 capsules. It's a great leap forward for the kangaroo meat industry. The scrotal sacks can be fashioned into bottle openers. *(Queensland) Sunday Mail, 3 Nov 2013.*

MARTIN ROSS

after two years and they began exchanging emails. Mr Waters asked: "Did Kaden like Burger Rings? That's all I seemed to want to eat after my surgery." The family replied that they had been Kaden's favourite snack and he ate them every day. *D.Mail, 24 Dec; (Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 27 Dec 2009.*

- A plumber developed artistic skills after getting a new kidney – which he believed came from a gifted painter. He needed the transplant because he suffered from polycystic kidney disease, which killed his father at 33. "Before the transplant I had no interest in art – I could barely draw at school," said Gary Leighton, 44, from Lee in south-east London. "Now I am painting with glass, with ink and acrylic, on wood with a blowtorch and copper, and using wind and leaves to create organic art." He was selling his paintings for up to £1,000 each, and handing over a share of the proceeds to Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital in London, where he had his operation. *Metro, Sun, 19 Aug 2009.*

- Cystic fibrosis sufferer Jennifer Wederell, 27, of Hawkwell, Essex, thought a lung transplant would save her life, but she was given the lungs of a 20-a-day smoker and died of lung cancer on 24 August 2012. While organs that show obvious signs of disease are discarded, a severe shortage of donors means that some 39 per cent of lungs used in transplants come from smokers or ex-smokers. *D.Mail, 27 Dec 2012.*

- Simon Cooper from Enfield, Middlesex, suffered from cystic fibrosis and at 16 was given the liver of an 18-year-old girl. Afterwards, he found himself swearing like a trooper, which was completely out of character. He was still turning the air blue 13 years later. Henry Kimball, 26, from Battersea, London, hated bitter beer, but following a kidney transplant it became his favourite drink. "I rarely drink anything else," he said. Sharron Coghlan, 45, from Luton, enjoyed romantic fiction and loved seafood. After being given the kidney of a 22-year-old man, her tastes turned to war books and historical biography, brown bread, mustard and cheese – she hated 'chic lit' and seafood. *Sun, 5 Jan 2013.*

THE SUN

ABOVE: Gary Leighton, who acquired artistic skills along with a new kidney

- Shaun Bird, 52, from York, had a heart transplant in August 2012 and suddenly developed a passion and a talent for cooking. Mike Rowland, 53, a builder from Henley-on-Thames, suffered from type 1 diabetes and was given the kidney and pancreas of a 40-year-old man; afterwards, he found he was a talented baker. Businessman Bill Wohl, 64, from Arizona, was fat and unfit, until he got a new heart from Hollywood stuntman Brady Michaels, who had been killed in a freak accident aged 36. After receiving the organ at the age of 52, Wohl went on to become a medal-winning swimmer, cyclist and runner. He has 28 gold medals from triathlon events round the world. *Sun, 5+28 Jan 2013.*

- New York dance teacher Claire Sylvia had a heart and lung transplant in 1988 and started to like beer, fried chicken and green pepper, which she later discovered were the tastes of her donor, an 18-year-old boy. See *A Change of Heart* (1997) by Claire Sylvia and William Novak.

- US academics have developed a theory called cellular memory phenomenon to explain the personality changes allegedly experienced by some transplant recipients. Gary Schwartz, a professor of medicine at the University of Arizona, has argued that cellular memory affects at least 10 per cent of all those who have a heart, lung, kidney or liver transplant. See **FT100:12, 159:24, 236:18–19, 238:10.**

SIDELINES...

MISTER ASBESTOS

Prem Singh, 65, draws crowds to his Old Delhi street restaurant, Ganesh, with his ability to plunge his hands into a vat of 200°C (392°F) boiling oil. He claims not to have been burnt or injured in 25 years of using his bare hands to fry fish. *MX News (Sydney), 17 Dec 2013.*

DULL CHIC REVIVES

Kevin Beresford, 61, had a hit with his calendar "Roundabouts of Great Britain 2012" and hoped to repeat his success with "Fast Disappearing Red Telephone Boxes of Wales 2014". By 20 November it had failed to shift a single copy in two months – but after jokey press reports, 200 were snapped up in two days. *D.Telegraph, 20 Nov; Sun, 22 Nov 2013.*

JUST THE JOB

A council worker responsible for death certificates and records of the deceased at Surrey History Centre in Woking is called Di Stiff. *Sun, 26 Dec 2013.*

TERROR TOM OF TEVISCOE

A black tomcat called Shiny has caused fear and loathing in the Cornish village of Little Teviscoe. It chases children, picks fights with dogs and other cats – and even bursts into houses to claw and scratch occupants. The 'devil cat' was reported to police five times after people and pets were hospitalised. Shiny's owner had their pet neutered and booked in to see an animal psychologist, but many residents wanted the querulous quadruped wiped out. *D.Telegraph, 28 Nov 2013.*

SIDELINES...

URN THIEVES TWARTED

After breaking into Golders Green Cemetery in north London around New Year's Eve, someone tried to steal the 4th century BC Greek urn containing the ashes of Sigmund Freud and his wife Martha. The urn was severely damaged but the thieves fled empty-handed. The urn had been given to the founder of psychoanalysis by Marie Bonaparte, great grandniece of Napoleon. *D.Mail, 16 Jan 2014..*

POKES IN THE EYE

A man was blinded in the left eye at the site of the Battle of Hastings after being shot with a ball bearing from a catapult in May 2013. Eli King and Anthony Adams, both 23, fired at Isaac Fuller, 25. We are told he was struck at almost exactly the same spot where King Harold was killed by an arrow in his eye, as shown in the Bayeaux Tapestry – except that the actual battle site is a matter for dispute. *<i> 19 Dec 2013.*

VULGAR CARTOGRAPHY

Until recently, Hong Kong was littered with obscene place names, initially bestowed by local people to make fun of the British colonial authorities. Hence Hai Si Wan (Vaginal Discharge Bay), Ngau Shi Wu (Cow Shit Lake), Dau Tau (Penis Head Rock), and so on. Some were wiped out in the 1990s: Foreign Devils Sex Organ became Pyramid Rock, while Oral Sex Corner became Swimming Dragon Cape. *MX News (Sydney), 17 Oct 2013*

MARTIN ROSS

Please cheese me...

And other tales of strange desire and sexual deviance

ABOVE: Photos apparently showing turophiliac and son of Philadelphia Chris Pagano, who takes his love of cheese very seriously.

- In the weeks around Christmas, an overweight man in his 40s approached several women with his genitals exposed while driving a silver or black sedan around the Mayfair district of Philadelphia. He would then dangle a large slice of Swiss cheese over his penis and offers to pay the women to perform sexual acts on him using the snack. At least two other women received messages on OKCupid they believe were from the same man, describing how being unpopular with women drove him to have sex with cheese. He offered to pay $50 for a woman to pleasure him with a slice.

The city's police suspect 41-year-old Chris Pagano, since he was arrested in 2006 and 2009 for allegedly propositioning women with Swiss cheese on the streets of Norristown, Philadelphia. Pagano claimed that the latest incidents had nothing to do with him – but the picture he used on Facebook was the same as the one on the OKCupid profile message sent to a woman asking her to indulge his cheese craving. Pagano is believed to be married.

Following the reports, Gabby Chest from nearby Bridesburg contacted the police. In July 2012, when she was 19, she set up a profile on dating site OKCupid and within days received a message from a man calling himself 'Chris', who was "looking for someone to perform masturbation on him with cheese." 'Chris' explained that as a young man he had struggled to find women and start relationships because he was overweight; "so I developed this fetish to help me deal with my sexual urges," he wrote. "I found that women tend to like dairy products, and settled on cheese to represent the girl. Thus I started having sex with cheese." Ms Chest said: "There's no doubt [the current cheese pervert] was him; he looked exactly like the picture on his profile."

> **"I settled on Swiss because of its texture and the way it feels against my penis"**

In an OKCupid message to another woman, 'Chris' explained: "I tried many different kinds of cheese, like American, Provolone, chez whiz, jack, and cheddar, but settled on Swiss as the best… because of its eye patterns, texture, and the way it feels against my penis." When he was younger he had far more stamina for cheese sex. "I was able to wrap and wear a good 1½ pounds of Swiss cheese against my penis, and wear it for hours at a time before I would climax… One last note, I do not like cheese, except for mozzarella, and that is the one cheese I have never used on myself. So no I do not eat the cheese after I am done using it for pleasure, it is discarded. I am always asked that question."*dailymail.co.uk, 16 Jan 2014.*

- A train traveller was seen trying to have sex with an on-board drinks trolley after downing a cocktail of alcohol and unspecified legal highs. Andrew Davidson, 25, from Letham, Angus, attempted the act on the Dundee to Perth train at 5.45pm on 5 July, while shouting "I want to kiss you, I want to f*** you" at the blameless trolley. The frightened attendant had run away. Davidson was later found lying face-down with no memory of the incident. He was ordered to carry out 100 hours of unpaid work. *STV News, 7 Jan; Metro, 8 Jan 2014.*

- Daniel Cooper, 24, got so drunk on a night out with friends in Holywell, North Wales, that he had sex with a Land Rover. He was caught naked on CCTV grinding against a blue 4x4 Discovery. "He was tyred and exhausted afterwards," said a

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ABOVE: Jodi Rose ties the knot with Le Pont de Diable in southern France.

friend. "We all felt sorry for the Land Rover." Earlier, Cooper had tried to hump a kebab shop counter. The unemployed father of three (or six), who changed his Facebook name to "Hotcock", told Flintshire magistrates he was not used to drinking and had no memory of what happened. He was tagged and banned on going out at weekend nights for the following three months and told to pay £85 costs. After the publicity, Cooper had messages from all over the world. "One American asked if I'd visit for a night out," he said. "He offered me a Mustang." *Sun, 12+30 Sept 2013.*

● Long-time *FT* readers will no doubt recall Karl Watkins, 20, who appeared in Hereford Crown Court in February 1993, charged with making love to pavements. He was observed many times face down on the paving stones with his pants around his ankles. He also attempted to mount an underpass. He was back in court two years later, on charges of simulating sex with black plastic dustbin bags in front of schoolgirls. His ultimate sexual fantasy was to be in a dustcart when the bin bags were crushed. See "Come Again?" **[FT73:14]**, plus *The Fortean Times Book of Weird Sex* (1995).

● A drunken man was arrested for trying to have sex with a 4ft (1.2m) stuffed giraffe in a toyshop in Dayton, Ohio. *Sun, 15 Dec 2013.*

GETTY IMAGES

● IT worker Paul Lovell, 61, tried to have sex with a sheep after some cows rejected his advances. Unfortunately for him, Lawrence Stephen and Natasha Brennan, who were having a picnic about 200ft (60m) away, saw him repeatedly approach the animals near his home in Enfield, north London. He was naked apart from socks and shoes, and carried his clothes in an orange shopping bag. Judge James Patrick asked the jury in Wood Green crown court to kindly get over their giggling fits. Lovell faced a custodial sentence. *Sun, 29 Jan; Metro, 31 Jan 2014.*

● The prize for Oddest Urge should be split between two men in Brenda Love's *Encyclopedia of Unusual Sex Practices* (1992). 'Pieface Brown' got his girlfriend to pie him at the point of ejaculation. She could only take so much, after which Pieface gatecrashed social functions, inviting women to *tarte* him up while he videoed it. However, Pieface is outshone by the soldier who swallowed Barbie dolls' heads at the critical moment. Love claims to have seen an X-ray of six heads in his intestine, and said: "He re-uses the dolls' domes after a good boiling."

● True love can take many forms. In one case last year, it took the form of an Australian artist marrying a 600-year-old French bridge. Jodi Rose took her love for the structures to another level as she wedded the Le Pont du Diable in Céret, southern France. The new Mrs Le Pont du Diable spent the previous decade travelling round the world recording the vibrations in bridge cables to incorporate in her Singing Bridges music project. It was love at first sight when she set eyes on the 'sensual' 14th century bridge, and it was only a matter of time before they became bridge and wife.

The happy couple tied the knot on 17 June 2013. There were 14 guests including close friends and members of the local community. Even the mayor of the neighbouring town, Saint-Jean-de-Fos, gave his blessing. The pair made their vows at the groom's entrance. Rose wore a bridal gown and veil, and commissioned rings for both her and the bridge. The groom, otherwise known as The Devil's Bridge, was quiet on their big day, but it was clear there are no trust issues between the newlyweds as the bridge is very supportive of his wife's music project.

"He understands that I love other bridges – and men – ours is a love that embraces the vagaries of life, as materialised in the swirling currents of the river that flows beneath his magnificent body," Rose wrote on her website. "The Devil's Bridge is everything I could desire in a husband – sturdy, trustworthy, sensual, kind and handsome."

Their union is not legally recognised in France, but Rose claims their marriage is as strong as any other. "This is not a decision I undertake lightly, just as our curves complement, we truly bring joy to each other, and the strength of his pylons will always carry me home." She said that their love is a symbolic and pagan affair as part of a world-view that sees "spiritual vibration in everything". *Metro, 4 July 2013.*

SIDELINES...

SEEING DOUBLE

An unusual cluster of twins has been identified living in two consecutive blocks in Havana, Cuba. The 12 pairs (10 identical), in a community of about 224 people, range in age from newborns to senior citizens. On average, one pair of twins is born for every 80 live births. None of the families is related. *[AP] 5 Oct 2013.*

AVIAN WHISPERER

A performer known as the Bird Brother amazed a crowd in Kathmandu, Nepal, when he summoned hundreds of noisy crows by cawing into a microphone. Gautam Sapkota made another series of sounds and the crows flew off at his bidding. *Metro, 7 Nov 2013.*

EATING HIMSELF

Fraser Griffiths, 40, accelerated his car into a Ford transit in Campbeltown, Argyll, seriously injuring its occupants. He then climbed out of his car, took off his clothes, before punching and kicking a teenage passenger from the Ford. Handcuffed and taken to the police station, Griffith threw himself headfirst into a wall, bit into his arm and swallowed his own flesh. He was confined in a mental hospital indefinitely. *Aberdeen Press & Journal, 10 July 2013.*

HIGH ROLLER

US Border Patrol Agents arrested a 55-year-old Mexican 600 yards off the coast of San Diego, California, on 19 September. He was floating on a duffle bag stuffed with $23,000 worth of cannabis – seven bundles weighing more than 50lb (23kg). *Phantoms & Monsters website, 27 Sept 2013.*

IN THE BLOOD?

Darren Wardle discovered that the biological father he had not seen for 44 years was a lollipop man – just like him. The 47-year-old found Paul Ferris, 62, working for the same council in Staffordshire. *Metro, 18 July 2013*

SIDELINES...

FORWARD FOX

Alerted by a loud thud, Jo Williams, 40, caught a fox licking the chin and mouth of her sleeping six-year-old daughter Ava, on the fourth floor of the family's home in Clapham Common, south London, on 3 September. It might have been attracted by a fruit-flavoured moisturising cream that had been applied to treat Ava's dry skin. It fled through an attic window. Ava slept through the episode. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 17 Sept 2013*.

A TASTE OF RUBBER

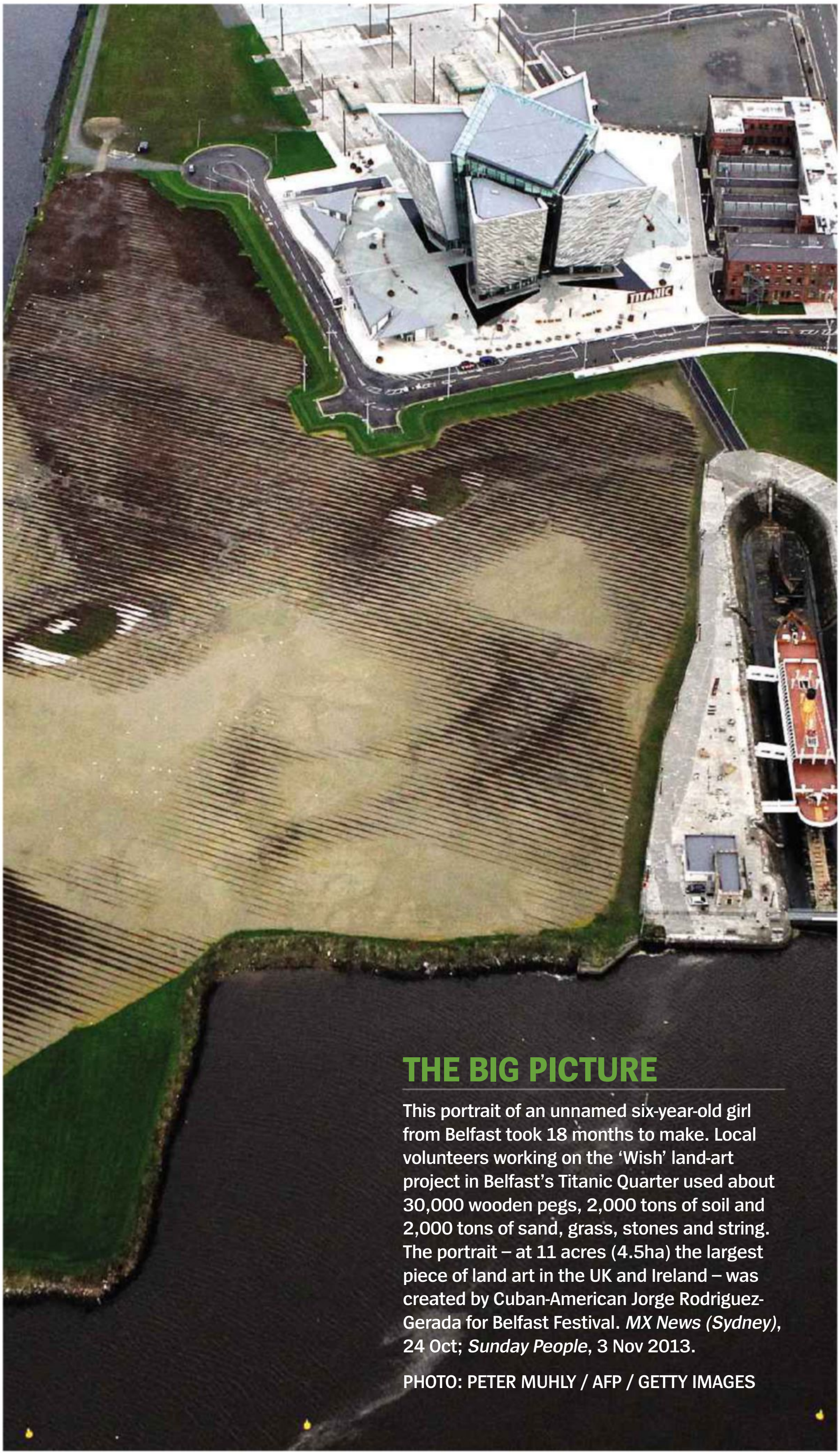
Foxes chewed all four tyres on Steve Wright's Renault Magane until they burst. The 29-year-old home security specialist from Dartford, Kent, said: "I looked on the cameras expecting to see a fella with a knife but instead I saw three foxes. You can see the car drop as the air leaves the tyres." *Sun, 18 Dec 2013.*

FISHY KNOCKOUT

Nathaniel Smith, eight, suffered severe head trauma on the Choctawhatchee River near Vernon, Florida, on 22 June when a 4ft (1.2m) sturgeon jumped from the water and knocked him unconscious in his family's 16ft (5m) boat. Two other children, aged 16 and 14 were also injured; one was knocked into the water. Nathaniel was bleeding from his ears and mouth. The fish was as big as him and probably twice his weight. *Panama City (FL) News Herald, 13 July 2013*.

CRAPPY OUTLOOK

Professional scatomancer SS Singh predicts the future by analysing fœcal matter. "It is a lost art," he said. "You'd by surprised how accurate it actually is." He picks up the chosen stool and smells it. "The stronger the aroma, the more accurate the prediction," he said. "The log shaped like a cigar suggests leadership, strength, longevity." *MX News (Sydney), 21 Nov 2013*.



THE BIG PICTURE

This portrait of an unnamed six-year-old girl from Belfast took 18 months to make. Local volunteers working on the 'Wish' land-art project in Belfast's Titanic Quarter used about 30,000 wooden pegs, 2,000 tons of soil and 2,000 tons of sand, grass, stones and string. The portrait – at 11 acres (4.5ha) the largest piece of land art in the UK and Ireland – was created by Cuban-American Jorge Rodriguez-Gerada for Belfast Festival. *MX News (Sydney)*, 24 Oct; *Sunday People*, 3 Nov 2013.

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MATT PATTINSON

LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES

The impossible may just take longer and require some imagination. **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at what thousands of garage-based inventors will make of the Fluid Space Drive

ETIENNE GILFLLAN

There are few more hazardous occupations for a scientist than getting in trouble with the laws of nature. These laws are defended by a scientific community as grimly determined as Judge Dredd – we all know about 'damned' scientific data. Sometimes, though, a trial case gets through which shows the law is more flexible than originally thought. This is the thinking behind the Fluid Space Drive or FSD, which looks like an outrageous attempt to defeat the law of conservation of momentum [http://www.wjetech.cl/] but which might be a matter of finding a loophole.

The principle of the FSD is quite simple. Imagine two astronauts sitting at either end of a spacecraft, throwing a cannonball between them. Each time it is thrown, the cannonball gives the spacecraft a kick in the opposite direction, in accordance with Newton's principle of equal and opposite reactions. Every time it is caught, the momentum of the spacecraft and cannonball cancel each other out again. You cannot propel a spacecraft by any rearrangement of matter inside it, only by throwing things out – which is how rocket engines, ion drives and other accepted propulsion systems work.

In the Fluid Space Drive, the cannonball being thrown between the astronauts is equipped with a braking mechanism like a parachute, which is used when it is thrown in one direction only. This means it hits one end of the spacecraft with much greater force than the other. FSD developer William Elliott argues that this creates an asymmetry in the momentum transfer, so the cannonball can create a net force. It's like a low-tech version of Roger Shawyer's electromagnetic EmDrive (see **FT201:14**).

Seemingly intractable laws may turn out to have loopholes

Conventional physicists would argue that the momentum lost by using a parachute is simply transferred to air molecules inside the spacecraft, and while it may not be felt, the momentum will still be there. This is similar to an old argument about whether a sealed cage with a bird in it weighs less if the bird is hovering in the cage by flapping its wings. The consensus is that the average downward force is exactly the same as if the bird had been solidly perched, but not everyone agrees.

Seemingly intractable laws may turn out to have loopholes. Elliott quotes the example of Earnshaw's Theorem. Samuel Earnshaw was a 19th century Yorkshire mathematician, who demonstrated the impossibility of magnetic levitation. Although magnets can be arranged to repel each other, Earnshaw showed that they could not remain stable in a fixed configuration.

Earnshaw's theorem is valid, but does have notable loopholes. Specifically, some sorts of materials and dynamic configurations – such as a spinning magnet – can levitate successfully. Perhaps the Victorians would not have had maglev trains anyway, but as it had been proved impossible, they did not try.

Sometimes the apparent limitations imposed by the law can stop research dead in its tracks, when in fact all that is needed is a little imagination. Einstein proposed a new method for amplifying a beam of light in 1918. This involved shining the light through a collection of hot molecules so they all released energy at the same time. The problem was that it would only work if there were more molecules in a higher energy state than in a lower state ('population inversion'). It had been established by Boltzmann that in any stable state, the lower energy state is always more common. The conditions required by Einstein could only be met by a substance with a temperature described by an imaginary number.

The breakthrough came in 1960 when researchers realised that the Boltzmann limitation only applied to a stable state. By applying a sudden flash of energy, it was possible to achieve population inversion and the conditions described by Einstein. Theodore Maiman heated a ruby crystal with a flash lamp and produce what would become known as the first laser.

The necessary hardware had been around for decades, but nobody had thought to assemble it as Maiman did. Lasers have now become ubiquitous, from broadband telecommunications to printers and supermarket bar-code scanners. They might have been 40 years' more advanced if Maiman's insight had come sooner.

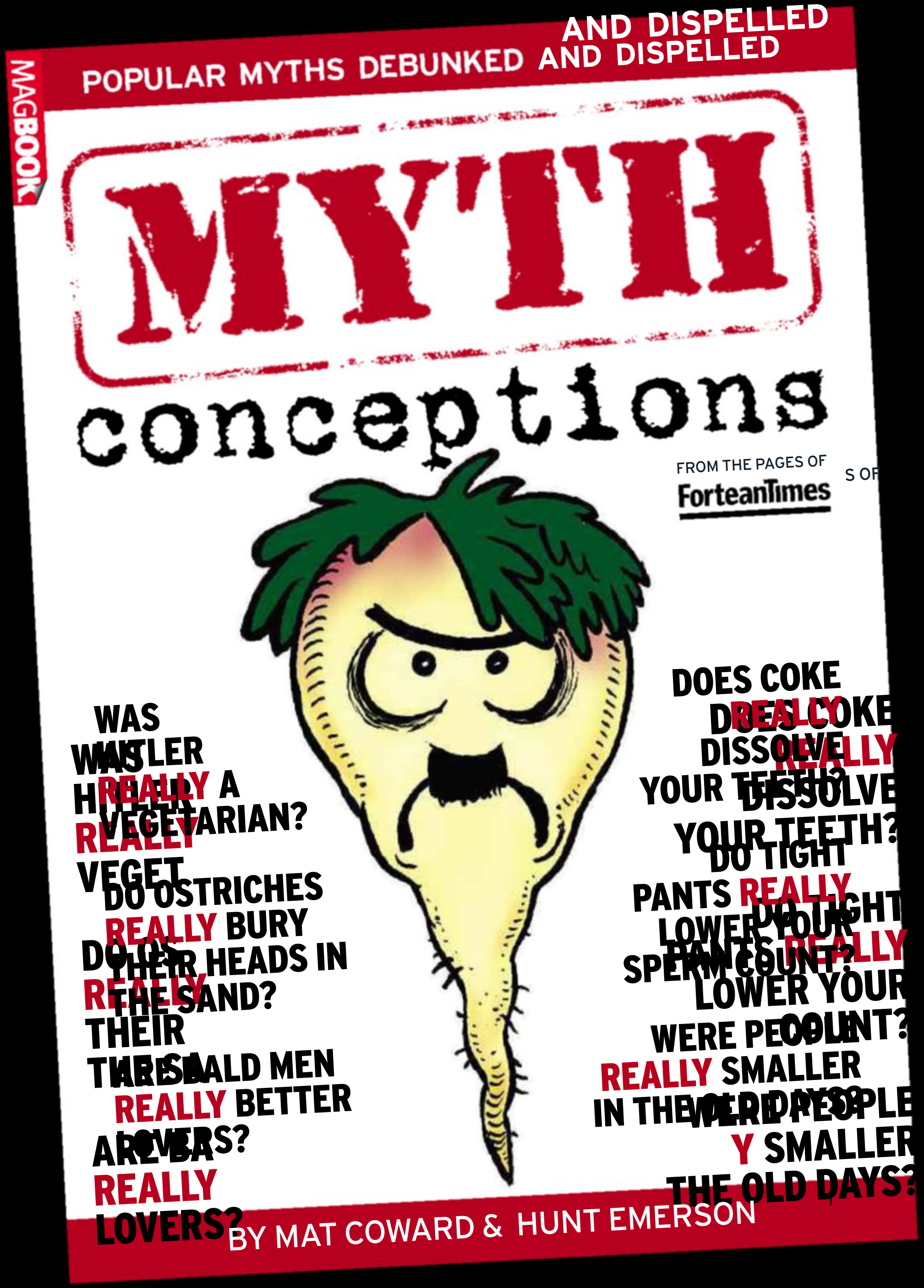
Einstein also predicted time travel, another field that has been largely neglected because of apparently insuperable barriers. In hindsight, this may also look like a failure of imagination.

Something similar nearly happened with John Pendry's now-celebrated work on Metamaterials. Pendry's insight, published in *Physical Review Letters 2000*, was that a suitably structured material might be used to create a perfect lens and to manipulate light in novel ways – for example, diverting it around an object to create an 'invisibility shield'. Critics objected that this implied a negative refractive index, something that was considered impossible, and the work must be flawed. They were quickly silenced when the Metamaterials were constructed shortly afterwards. While negative refractive indices are not found in nature, this does not mean that they cannot exist.

This sort of historical background gives heart to William Elliott and his co-workers from the University of Chile on the FSD. It also drives thousands of garage-based inventors convinced that they alone have the secret to the next big breakthrough. The great thing about science is that, although it may sometimes seem as unchangeable as a religion, it does respond to facts. Satellite propulsion is an industry worth billions and a new technology would be hard to ignore.

Never mind the theory, set the FSD to full speed ahead and see what happens...

THE TRUTH ISN'T OUT THERE...



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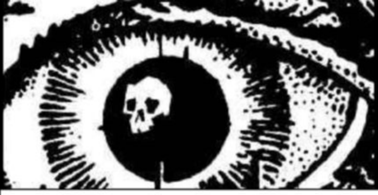


MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE pays tribute to the late Colin Wilson and his work on ghosts and poltergeists

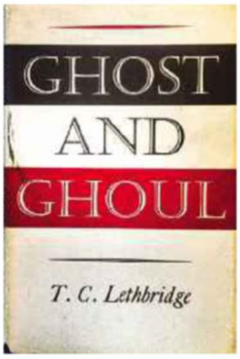
Further to the well-deserved tributes carried by *Fortean Times* for Colin Wilson following his death in December 2013, perhaps I may be permitted to record his influence upon today's generation of ghost hunters.

As several commentators pointed out, the death of Nelson Mandela overshadowed that of Colin Wilson, meaning fewer obituaries appeared in the British press, and there was a certain cosmic irony in the timing of the two deaths. I remember on 18 June 1992 attending a lecture entitled 'Beyond the Paranormal' given by Wilson to a packed meeting in Kensington organised by the Society for Psychical Research. During the course of his wide-ranging talk Wilson announced from the platform a prediction sent to him by a clairvoyant stating that the then recently-freed Nelson Mandela was going to be assassinated.

This prediction caused much discussion, but mercifully went unfulfilled. Then, rather as the news of the assassination of President Kennedy on 22 November 1963 eclipsed the deaths of Aldous Huxley and CS Lewis on the same day, Mandela's death relegated Wilson's passing to minor notice. Certainly he would have appreciated the irony in this, for even before becoming seriously interested in occult and esoteric subjects in the 1960s he had an eye for spooky and strange coincidences. For example, in his book *Rasputin* (1963) he was the first writer to point out that Grigori Rasputin survived a near-fatal assassination attempt by an insane knife-wielding woman at Pokrovoskoe in Russia on 28 June 1914. This was the same day as the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were killed by a Serbian nationalist at Sarajevo – "the shots that started the First World War". Examining the time difference between the two places, Wilson calculated that the two assassins struck at almost the same moment, allowing for the difference in time zones arising from 50 degrees in longitude (although some sources claim Rasputin was struck on the 29th). Had the outcome of the two incidents been reversed, modern history could have been very different. Wilson saw it as "a coincidence that makes one incline to doubt the 'blindness of history'".

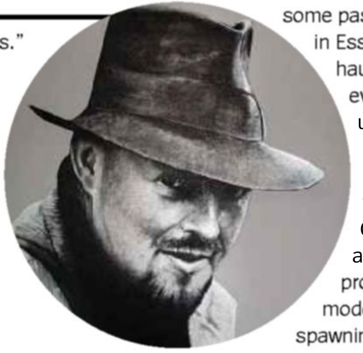
LEFT: Colin Wilson in 1984. **BELOW**: The theories of TC Lethbridge were to have a profound influence on Wilson's thinking about the 'paranormal'.

WILSON TOOK AN INTEREST IN HOW CERTAIN PLACES HAD AN ENERGY THAT WAS NOT BENIGN



Probably Colin Wilson's most influential book on ghost investigation was *Mysteries* (1978) [reviewed **FT28:21-23**], a sequel to his 1971 classic *The Occult* in which he argued: "The mind of man possesses many levels. We are familiar enough with the notion of unconscious levels, and the fact that such functions as digestion and body temperature operate on these levels. It is no more difficult to grasp the proposition that 'paranormal powers' could also operate on other levels of consciousness."

However, it was really his re-examination of the theories of archæologist TC Lethbridge – who turned to psychic research following his retirement – which made the most impact. Lethbridge was a dowser who after extensive experiments and a number of spontaneous experiences with ghosts believed that the two phenomena were linked. Lethbridge believed that different substances had 'fields' and these were found, for instance, around woods and springs – in fact everything has such 'a field'. He considered that a very strong force could impress itself on one of these fields and that ghosts were some kind of recording that was left behind, often linked with water and outbursts of emotion. Individuals who could dowse were susceptible to these impressions and experience them as haunting phenomena.



There was a lot more to Lethbridge's theories than this, with the first section of *Mysteries* devoted to an exploration of them with Wilson also making links to the then fashionable notion of leys as channels of mysterious but natural earth energies and currents. Following the leads from Lethbridge, Alfred Watkins and earth mysteries enthusiasts, Wilson took a great interest in how certain places seemed to have an energy that was not always benign.

An example was a story of Henry James (senior), father of the novelist and author of *Turn of the Screw,* undergoing what he termed a "vastation" experience at Windsor in early May 1844: "A perfectly insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause, and only to be accounted for, to my perplexed imagination, by some damned shape squatting invisible to me within the precincts of the room, and raying out from his fetid personality influences fatal to life." This led to a profound psychological and spiritual depression that only ended two years later when James discovered the works of the mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Wilson speculated whether this might have been connected with leys or earth energies flowing around the time of the old Celtic Mayday and local legends of hauntings about 'Herne the Hunter' in Windsor Great Park.

Wilson considered that leys could be linked with ghostly manifestations and noted that some passed through Borley Church in Essex, then considered very haunted. Such ideas were evocative, even if now unconvincing. His interest in ghosts at this period led him on to become a vice-chairman of the Ghost Club between 1981-1994 and the ideas he promoted proved very influential in modern British ghost hunting, spawning the use of dowsing and divining rods and pendulums on a wide scale – despite it being wholly unclear what was actually going on when the rods twitched or the pendulums swung at supposedly haunted locations. Uncritical acceptance now means the use of dowsing rods has extended far beyond Lethbridge's original conception, as a means of interactive spirit communication (for a good discussion see *A Brief Guide to Ghost Hunting*, 2013, by Leo Ruickbie). Such notions were never countenanced before *Mysteries* by either Lethbridge or anyone following the first popular book investigating hauntings, *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* (1973) by Andrew Green, which in my view still remains the best all-round introduction to the topic.

For Wilson, this interest in hauntings was a remarkable personal change since the early 1960s, when he tended to be rather scathing about ghosts stories, even as works of fiction. For example in his study of the imagination,

LEFT: The house at 30 East Drive, Pontefract, that was the scene of a major poltergeist outbreak in the late 1960s.

Strength To Dream (1962), he rubbished the best ghost stories of Algernon Blackwood and E Nesbit as "very close to simply telling lies" and even dismissed many M R James stories as containing "ghosts that, after all, could frighten no-one but a nervous schoolboy". However, he was prepared to concede that "James had a certain pedantic, scholarly cast of mind that somehow makes a delightful contrast with his ghosts and bogies. At his best… there is a gentle, ironic delicacy of touch…"

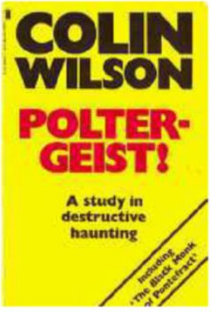
Until then, it seems that Wilson had only had one paranormal experience. It didn't seem significant at the time, leaving him puzzled rather than frightened. He described this in his book *Poltergeist!* (1981) as occurring early one morning in 1960, soon after his mother, father and 13-year-old sister had moved to live with him in Cornwall. He recalled: "I was awakened by a loud, repeated banging sound. It sounded just like someone hammering something made of metal, with slow, steady blows."

These sounds, which began around 5am on a bright sunny morning, seemed initially to come from outside the house. Going outside, he then realised the bangs appeared to be coming from the top of the house, where his sister and two other guests were found to be asleep. He examined all the hot water pipes, but no problems could be found. Wilson's father got up and joined the search but they could find no explanation, and so they both went back to bed. Ten minutes later the hammering sound ceased, then resumed an hour later with another dozen blows before stopping entirely. The noises were never repeated. Wilson stated: "I assume that the sounds were somehow connected with my sister, who was not particularly happy at being dragged away from her home town (Leicester) to live in the country." His account certainly matches many other records in the literature of poltergeist activity and one-off disturbances. An intriguing incidental detail is that Wilson's house stood alone in a field which brings to mind Sacheverall Sitwell's observation in *Poltergeists* (1940) that isolated rural properties seemed often to feature in outbreaks.

However, two decades later Wilson abandoned the idea that poltergeists were solely attributable to the unconscious mind, after studying older stories in detail and rescuing from oblivion the strange 1960s case of the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' (filmed as *When The Lights Went Out* in 2012; for a full account of both the case and the film, see **FT293:28-37**). Though principally a poltergeist which invaded a semi-detached house at 30 East Drive, Pontefract, Yorkshire, in 1966-68, at times it seemed like something out of an M R James story such as *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*. The bizarre manifestations disrupted the lives of the residents, Jean and Joan Pritchard and their two children, 15-year-old Philip and 12-year-old Diane, and included the appearance of a hooded figure, which some believed to be the ghost of a monk from the local Cluniac Priory who had been executed for rape in the Middle Ages. Events were so extraordinary that Wilson felt inspired to travel to Yorkshire in 1980 to listen to the family's account and contemporary tape recordings of banging noises. As a result Wilson changed his mind about the nature of poltergeist outbreaks:

"At that time, I believed poltergeists were somehow caused by the unconscious minds of emotionally disturbed teenagers… It was while the girl, Diane, was describing to me how she had been dragged upstairs by the throat by some invisible force, which left black bruises on her throat, that I realised this was not her unconscious mind. This was a 'Spirit' (*Daily Mail, 9* June 2000).

Such accounts led Wilson to endorse the idea that poltergeists were discarnate entities – either of the dead or of non-human forces that drained the energy of the living to produce manifestations. He also examined ideas picked up from cases in Brazil by Enfield poltergeist researcher Guy Lyon Playfair, and originally put forward by spiritualist or 'spiritist' Allan Kardec in the 19th century.


COLIN WILSON
POLTER-GEIST!
A study in destructive haunting
Including 'The Black Monk of Pontefract'

Prior to Wilson's book *Poltergeist!* (1981), the unquiet spirit hypothesis had been little promoted by anyone since Harry Price, one of the few exceptions being Professor Ian Stevenson, best known for his work on reincarnation, who published an article 'Poltergeists: Are They Living Or Are They Dead?' (*Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, v.*66, 1972).

Both Stevenson and Wilson realised that older cases were often better documented than recent ones and could provide insights that were just as important as those from newer investigations. As well as going back to the older literature, Wilson helped get some of it reprinted. He supplied introductions for new editions of such old psychic classics as Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) and Cesare Lombroso's *After Death, What?* (1908), both being examples of authors who became convinced that spirits lay behind many psychic manifestations.

Wilson was also generous in helping encourage the works of more modern writers in the field, regardless of merit. Some of the books he endorsed were excellent, such as Adam Crabtree's *Multiple Man: Exploration in Possession and Multiple Personality* (1988) but others were decidedly dubious. An example may be found in his charitable introduction to *The Dark Gods* (1980) by Anthony Roberts and Geoff Gilbertson, authors who appeared to have absorbed too much of HP Lovecraft's mythos before bedtime and argued, apparently seriously, that "the Dark Gods" (malignant non-corporeal beings) – variously disguised as UFOs, spirit guides, theosophical mahatmas, villains of science fiction films, and apparitions of the Virgin Mary – were busy manipulating religious, occult and political history [reviewed **FT33:45-47**]. This was part of a cosmic conspiracy which all seemed to point towards an apocalypse arriving around the year 2000 (fortunately not realised). Similarly, Wilson promoted the posthumous publication of FW Holiday's *The Goblin Universe* (1986) linking ghosts, the reincarnation of serial killers, the Loch Ness Monster, cryptozoology and UFOs in an eccentric and confusing brew. Amongst his own personal and prolific output he also produced books on life after death (which he became convinced was a reality) and the operation of psychic powers.

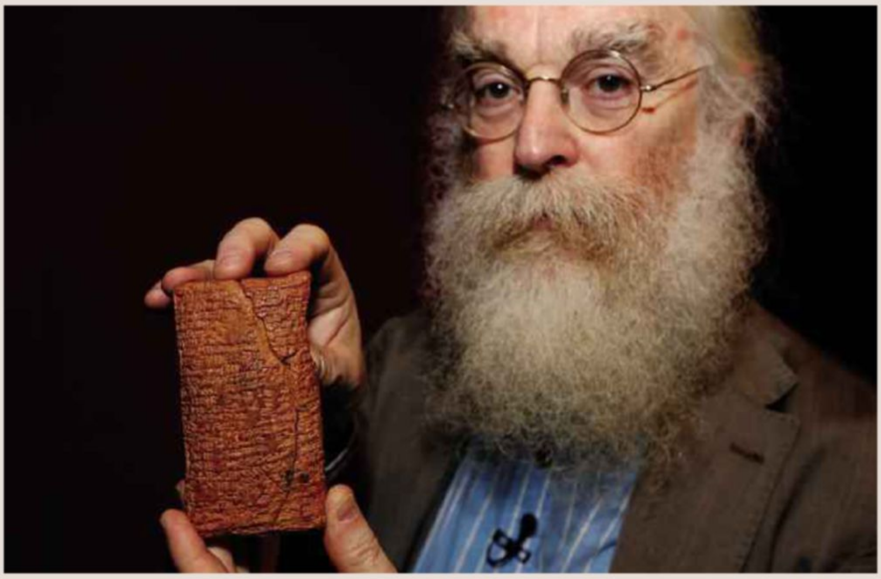
Much earlier, in his first autobiography *Voyage to a Beginning* (1969), Wilson had boldly declared that if he could force his body and brain on for another century he would solve single-handedly all the philosophical problems facing mankind. This was something of a presumptuous claim, showing him still brimming with youthful self-belief at nearly 40. Although he apparently did not get far in solving all philosophical riddles in the 100-year time scale he identified as needed, it would not be at all surprising if many of his best books were still be being read for many years to come.

If we look for an epitaph for Colin Wilson as a writer in this field, perhaps he might be summed up in Shakespeare's words: "A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep, careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, or to come; insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal." (Provost in *Measure for Measure,* IV:2)

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)



SANG TAN / AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

ABOVE: Irving Finkel and his ark instructions. **BELOW:** The ancient mural showing a possible volcanic eruption.

YES AND NOAH

In the 1940s, one Leonard Simmons brought home a clay tablet carved with a mysterious script from the Middle East. Some experts told him it was just bazaar junk, but decades later, his son, Douglas, had it examined at the British Museum by Irving Finkel, one of relatively few people able to read cuneiform, the wedge-shaped writing of ancient Mesopotamia. He identified the piece as a genuine 3,700-year-old Babylonian tablet, which he saw gave precise instructions on how to build an apparent ark – not the usual naive depiction of a boat with a prow topped with a hut-like cabin, but a giant circular coracle, 3,600m^2 (39,000ft^2) in size (about two-thirds the size of a soccer pitch), constructed from coiled palm-fibre rope like a giant basket, reinforced by wooden ribs, and waterproofed with bitumen.

The tablet version of the ark story is far older than the biblical accounts, and Finkel reckons that the writers of the Bible drew on ancient stories encountered by Hebrew scholars during the Babylonian exile. In fact, there are other ancient Middle Eastern tablets telling of a mighty flood (perhaps a dim folk memory of a great natural catastrophe) and an ark, but this tablet is special because of its detailed descriptions. Nevertheless, Finkel is sure that the coracle ark was never built, arguing that the tablet is the product of a storyteller adding convincing details for an audience knowledgeable about coracle building.

The tablet is on display in the British Museum, and Finkel has written a new book, *The Ark Before Noah*. There is also to be a Channel 4 documentary based on his research. *Guardian, 24 Jan 2014, etc.*

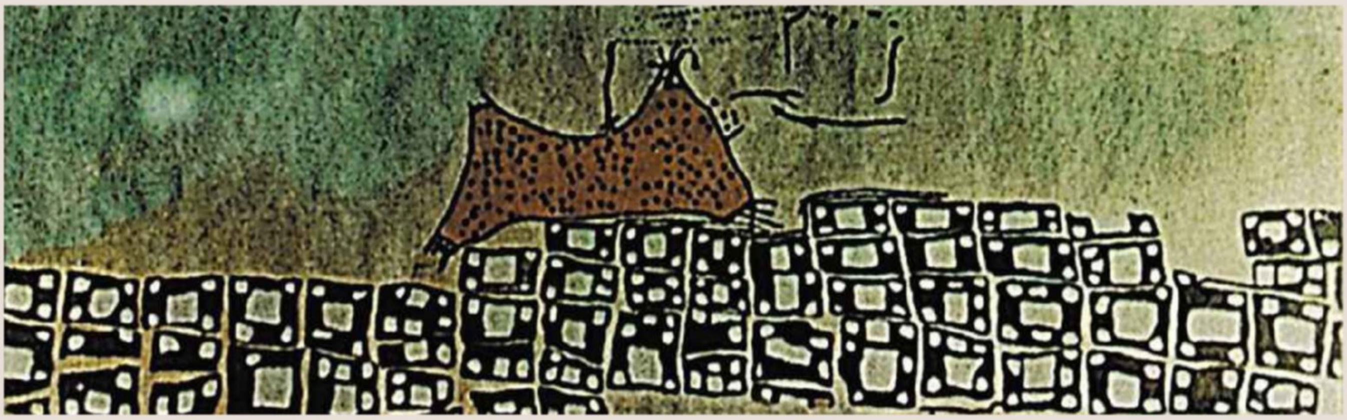
FIRST LANDSCAPE PAINTING?

The 9,000-year-old Neolithic site of Catalhoyuk, Turkey, harbours what is possibly the oldest landscape painting yet uncovered. It is a mural dated to about 6,600 BC, which appears to show two mountain peaks exhibiting some sort of activity, with a cluster of closely packed buildings presented in plan beneath. Its interpretation as a depiction of a volcanic eruption has proved to be controversial, but now an international team of scientists has analysed rock samples from Hasan Dagi, a relatively local twin-peaked volcano, and using zircon geochronology dating techniques has shown that the painting of the mural could have taken place during the time-frame in which an eruption of the Hasan Dagi volcano occurred. *The paper detailing the research, "Identifying the Volcanic Eruption Depicted in a Neolithic Painting at Çatalhöyük, Central Anatolia, Turkey", was published on 8 Jan 2014 in open access form in PLOS|One (www.plosone.org).*

LOSING IT

This column does not often deal with ancient sites under threat or being destroyed or damaged because such is happening constantly for various reasons, ranging from wars to plain old vandalism, and listing them would leave room for little else. Another reason, though, is that we usually can't do much about most of the occurrences of loss anyway. However, two current cases in Britain are amenable to our attention.

One of these is Old Oswestry, an impressive Iron Age hillfort that stands close to the England-Wales border just outside the town of Oswestry, in legend the birthplace of King Arthur's wife, Guinevere. A prominent hill set in its original landscape, its flanks are encircled with a series of ditches, formed between ramparts, that were designed to hinder attackers. An archæological survey in 2010 found man-made structures in fields to the north-east of the fort, and two years ago an Iron Age road was discovered. It is said to be one of Europe's best preserved Iron Age hill forts, seen for miles around for over 3,000 years. Now, due to recently relaxed planning laws, there are plans to build nearly 200 luxury homes up against the base of this magnificent landscape feature. Local people (even the town council) and heritage groups strongly oppose the plans. HOOOH (Hands Off Old



GEORGE NASH

ABOVE: The ‘Pegasus Stone’. This was found near the western entrance of Old Oswestry Hillfort. The bas-relief of a horse can be seen, partially damaged by later plough marks (the linear markings) when it lay in the ground. Archæologist George Nash considers it to be part of a Celtic/Roman roadside shrine. It now stands in Oswestry Museum.

Oswestry Hillfort) have a website containing a photograph of the site and an online petition: http://chn.ge/17lw7dT, and there is also a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/OldOswestryHillfort.

Meanwhile, on the other, eastern, side of not-so-merry old England an important though little-heralded ritual landscape around the village of Fornham All Saints, Suffolk, is under threat, again from a planned housing development, this time involving 900 houses. Your columnist drew attention to this landscape in the River Lark valley back in 1989 (Nigel Pennick and Paul Devereux, *Lines on the Landscape,* Hale). It contains a cursus, one of those deeply mysterious Neolithic linear earthworks (mainly visible now only from the air) that are usually ruler-straight or straight in sections.

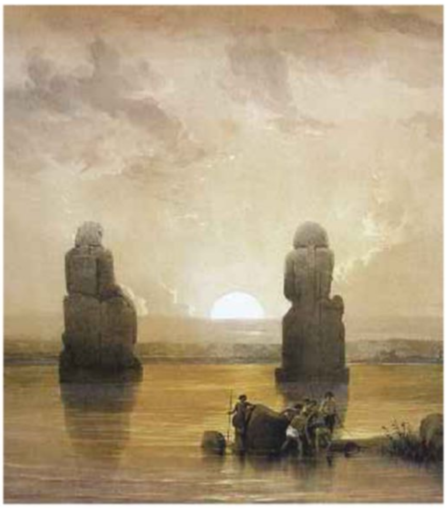
The Fornham All Saints cursus is one of these latter, comprising three straight lengths, each set at slightly different orientations and extending in all for about a mile. Intriguingly, the ancient village church stands on the cursus; curious and inexplicable relationships between mediæval church sites and Neolithic cursuses was noted in the 1989 study. This is further displayed here in that the line of the south-east axis of the cursus points directly to the site of Bury St Edmund’s Abbey, a little over 2 miles (3.5km) distant, where, in 1215, barons took an oath to demand the Magna Carta from King John. Again, there is local opposition to this development vandalism – it appears the planning has gone ahead without consultation with heritage or archæological bodies. With today’s government, it seems developers rule. The final planning decision was slated for 12 February, now passed when you read this. One trusts that protection of this country’s irreplaceable sacred geography will prevail.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

173: MEMNON-ICS

Principal Sources: Callistratus, *Descriptions*, no9; *Historia Augusta*, Life of Septimius Severus, ch17; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, bk1 ch42 para1; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, bk6 ch4; Pliny, *Natural History*, bk36 ch11 para58; Scholiast on Juvenal, *Satire* 15, v5; Strabo, *Geography*, bk17 ch1 para46; Tacitus, *Annals*, bk2 ch61. Plus, the hundred or so (Greek & Latin) graffiti (prose and verse) on the statue itself; cf. my ‘Poems on Memnon,’ *Prudentia* 15 (1983), 53-7, also Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Hakkert, Toronto, 1974).



Fort (*Books*, pp585-9) inventoried bleeding statues. I previously (**FT145:18**) did sweating and weeping effigies. Now we have an ancient one that warbled. It was much evoked in Victorian literature, e.g.: Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’; George Heath (1844-69), ‘Man O’ Mow’; Tennyson, ‘The Palace of Art’. Whether it inspired the modern pop group The Singing Statues I cannot say.

Our musical monument was one of two ruined colossi near Egyptian Thebes, depicting pharaoh Amenhotep III. But some bright spark, perhaps a canny tourist entrepreneur, spread the word that it was really that of Memnon, Greek son of the goddess Dawn.

All modern accounts say the singing began in 27 BC, occurring only at dawn, and ended when emperor Septimius Severus (197-211) silenced it forever thanks to his attempted repair – sounds like a computer upgrade.

This may or may not be the whole story. Juvenal’s Scholiast and a graffito poem by Julia Fabulla (AD 95) trace Memnon’s cantatory history back to the demented King Cambyses (529-2 BC) who tried to break the statue open, suspecting some Wizard-of-Oz-like machine inside. However, this could be confusion with his depredations of Egyptian temples reported by Herodotus (*Histories*, bk 3 ch37) without mention of Memnon.

As for Severus’s ‘repair’, the one text (*HA*) also invoked simply says: “He visited Memphis, Memnon, the Pyramids, and the Labyrinth and examined them all with great care” (*diligenter inspexit*). The Greek contemporary sources (Cassius Dio and Herodian) say nothing about this.

The last datable graffito is AD 205. So, if Severus was the culprit, it will have happened after this. Memnon was certainly silenced somehow after this year since Callistratus (3rd or 4th-century) speaks of its performances (adding an evening one) as in the past.

Strabo (an eye-and-ear witness) suspected the sound was produced by someone in the crowd, disbelieving in the statue’s ability to give voice. Pausanias, another visitor, evinces less outright scepticism, guardedly reporting: “Every day at sunrise it cries out, the sound most closely resembling the snapping of a lute or lyre string.”

Memnon became a ‘must’ for tourists of all classes, Greek and Roman, men and women – Juvenal’s ridicule was exceptional. Lucian (*Toxaris*, ch27) says pilgrimage there was a true test of friendship. He also (*Lover of Lies*, ch33) satirises exaggerated personal experiences (at least the ancients were spared colour-slides and digital photos), deflating a fellow who claimed Memnon had vouchsafed him a seven-verse oracle.

Apart from Severus, the only attested imperial visitor (except Prince Germanicus in Tiberius’s time) was Hadrian. Memnon was not overawed, at first failing to perform for his royal guest (though twice warbling for empress Sabina), before relenting.

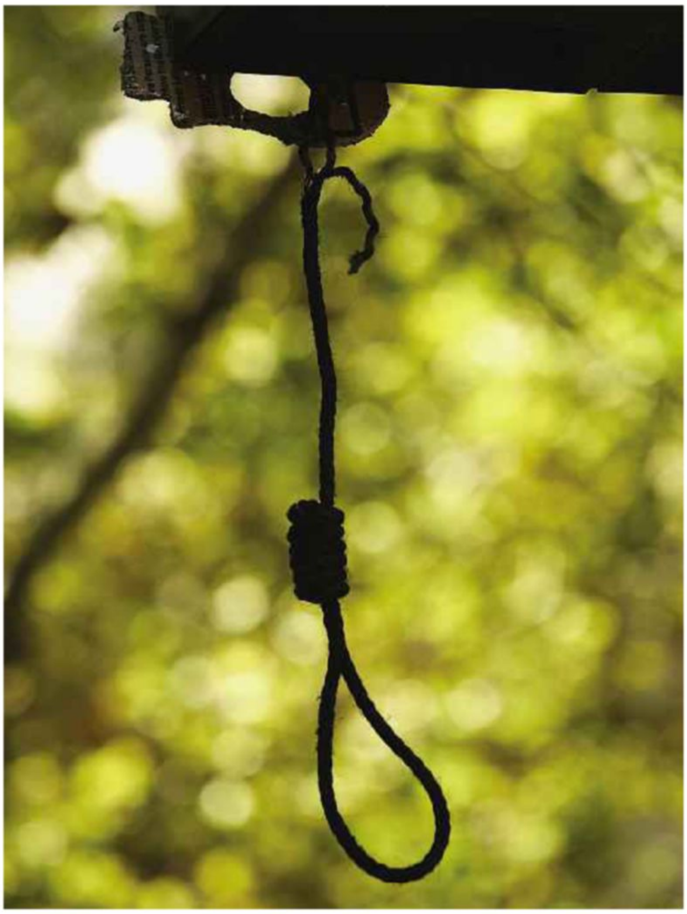
We might have expected a visit from Nero. And no doubt he would have gone, had not his planned trip to Alexandria been aborted. A shame; prospect of confrontation between singing statue and singing emperor boggles the mind.

Modern explanations of the phenomenon attribute it to sudden changes of temperature when the rising sun hit the cold stone producing matudinal vibrations, an explanation as old as Tacitus. Any covering reconstruction work is presumed to have silenced poor Memnon for ever. JB Mayor’s note on Juvenal adduces a similar cause and effect noise from solar heat on chilled crevices on the banks of the Oronooko.

“The song never dies, just the singer” – The Cooper Brothers

CHEATING THE GALLOWS

Tales old and new of the men (and women) they couldn't hang...



CAMERON SPENCER / GETTY IMAGES

- Just before sunrise on 9 October 2013, Alireza M, a 37-year-old Iranian jailed three years ago for possessing a kilo of methamphetamine crystal, was taken out of prison in Bojnourd, Khorasan province, north-east Iran, and hanged. Exactly 12 minutes later medics pronounced him dead and sent his body for burial. In the morgue the next day, a worker preparing the corpse for family collection noticed condensation in the plastic cover Alireza was wrapped in. He was still breathing and was rushed to Bojnourd's Imam Ali hospital. "We couldn't believe he was still alive when we went to collect his body," said a relative. "More than anyone, his two daughters are very happy." However, Mohammed Erfan, a judge with Iran's administrative justice court, told the state-run *Jam-e-Jam* newspaper: "The sentence issued by the revolutionary court is the death penalty… in such circumstances it should be repeated, once medical staff confirm his health is good enough." Not surprisingly, human rights activists disagreed.

Under Iranian law, convicts should be conscious and relatively healthy before execution – hanging is delayed for people who are pregnant or in a coma. When someone is sentenced to death by stoning, for instance in adultery cases, if they manage to climb out of the ground after being buried up to the neck or somehow survive the ordeal, their life is spared.

To justify the re-execution, Judge Erfan cited a fatwa issued by the Shia Grand Ayatollah Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani, which states: "After the execution and before the burial, if the convict comes back to life while in the morgue or at the coroner's office and recovers after treatment, the verdict for Qisas [retribution] or Had [punishment] remains viable." However, a statement issued on behalf of Ayatollah Golpaygani said this ruling should not be applied in Alireza's case and the cleric had "another view" about his destiny. The references to Qisas and Had mean the fatwa in question only applies to sentences for certain crimes, called Hodud in Islamic terminology, that are not at the discretion of the judge but are defined by sharia law. Under the Iranian interpretation of sharia, certain crimes such as sodomy, rape, theft, fornication, apostasy and consumption of alcohol for the third time are considered to be 'claims of God' and therefore have a mandatory death sentence. Alireza is instead condemned to Tazir, a punishment that can be administered at the discretion of a judge.

"Alireza's case is extraordinary and very exceptional," said Amnesty's Drewery Dyke. "There's no complainant in his case and the chief of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Larijani, should intervene so that his life is spared." About five days later, the Iranian justice minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi announced that Alireza would not be hanged a second time. It was unclear whether this was the government view or whether Pourmohammadi had succeeded in persuading the judiciary to drop the re-execution. There were also contradictory reports about Alireza's condition. A nurse told *Jam-e-Jam* that his general health was satisfactory and improving every day, but other Iranian newspapers reported that he was clinically brain-dead. In the two months since the 'moderate' Hassan Rouhani became president in August 2013, at least 125 people had been executed. *D.Mail, 16 Oct; Guardian, 17+24 Oct; Irish Times, 18 Oct 2013.*

- John Bartendale, a pipe player, was hanged at York on 27 March 1634 before a small crowd outside Micklegate Bar. After three quarters of an hour, when it was generally assumed he was dead, his body was cut down, briefly examined, and then buried nearby. Some time later, a Mr Vavasour of Hazlewood, and his servant, were riding by and noticed the earth move. They dismounted and began to remove the soil, discovering John Bartendale, who struggled to sit up. He had no recollection of how he came to be in such a position. Water and food were sent for, and when sufficiently restored he was taken again to York Castle to be retried; but it was questioned whether a man could be sentenced again to be hanged after the Sheriff had certified him dead. In the end, he was granted a full pardon, it being felt that an Act of God had been witnessed in this exceptional case. *Yorkshire Ridings Magazine, Aug 1967.*

- Convicted of murdering her illegitimate child, Ann Green was hanged on 14 December 1650 in the Castle Yard, Oxford, "where she hung for about half an hour, being pulled by the legs, and struck on the breast by divers of her friends; and, after all, had several strokes given her on the stomach with the butt-end of a musket." She was taken to be dissected, but the physicians "perceived a small rattling in her throat… within 14 hours she began to speak, and the next day talked and prayed very heartily." She was then found to be innocent of infanticide, the child having been stillborn at four months. She was pardoned, married, bore three children and lived in good repute in Steeple Barton, where she died in 1659. (J Caulfield: *Portraits, Memoirs and Characters of Remarkable Persons,* 1819).

- The story of Margaret Dixon of Musselburgh is very similar. When a baby's body was found near her home, she was convicted of infanticide, although she had probably miscarried. She was hanged in November 1728, her body cut down and delivered to her friends. As it was a warm day, they stopped for a drink in Pepper-Mill, just outside Edinburgh. "While they were refreshing themselves, one of them perceived the lid of the coffin to move, and uncovering it, the woman immediately sat up, and most of the spectators ran off, with every sign of trepidation." (Knapp & Baldwin: *The New Newgate Calendar*, 1826). Someone in the pub bled her and she was put to bed. The next morning she was well enough to walk home. By Scottish law, she was released from the consequences of her alleged offence. It seems her escape was due to some peculiar malformation in her neck. She was still alive in 1753.

- Dixon's malformation of the neck recalls the case of Judith of Balham in the reign of Henry III (1216-1272). Convicted of harbouring thieves, she was hanged from nine o'clock on Monday morning to sunrise on Tuesday, but survived and was pardoned. "The Extraordinariness of this Case is suppos'd to have happen'd upon the Account that the Larynx or upper part of her Wind-Pipe was turn'd to Bone, and made so strong, that the weight of her Body could not compress it." (J Collier: *A Supplement to the Great Historical, Genealogical and Poetical Dictionary*, 2nd ed, 1727).

- John Smith from Malton in Yorkshire was convicted of burglary in 1705 and hanged on Christmas Eve. After 15 minutes a reprieve arrived. He was cut down, taken to a neighbouring house and restored to life by bleeding "and other proper applications", after which he was known as "Half-hanged Smith". He returned to burglary, was taken again, tried and acquitted. After further housebreakings he was again indicted, but the prosecutor dying the day before the trial, Smith once more cheated the gallows. What became of him is unknown. (Knapp & Baldwin, op. cit.)

- Convicted with several others of rape and murder, William Duell was hanged at Tyburn on 24 November 1740. After dangling the customary time, he was cut down and taken to Surgeons' Hall for dissection. As an attendant washed the body, signs of life were observed. A surgeon took several ounces of blood from him, and in a couple of hours he was able to sit in a chair, though speechless and apparently in great agony. He was returned to Newgate, where the next day he had a hearty appetite. Great crowds came to see and question him. His sentence was transmuted to transportation for life. *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1740, p.570; Knapp & Baldwin, op. cit.).

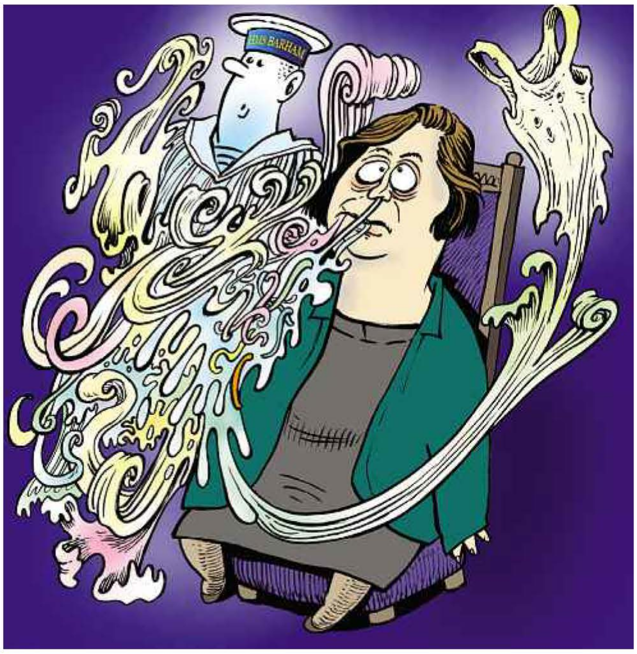
- Most famous, perhaps, is the story of John 'Babbacombe' Lee (1864-1945), convicted on weak circumstantial evidence of murdering his employer. Three times on 23 February 1885 he stood on the newly built scaffold at Exeter Jail and three times the trapdoor failed to open. Each time Lee, 19, was taken back to his cell, engineers inspected the trap door, the executioner pulled the handle and, without Lee on the scaffold, the mechanism worked perfectly. Lee had his death sentence commuted to life imprisonment. He was released in 1907 and emigrated to America, where he died.

Several explanations were offered for Lee's good fortune, but the official version was that when prisoners were helping to build the new scaffold they nailed a warped board underneath the planking. This board was beneath the spot where the chaplain stood while the prisoner was on the scaffold. The chaplain's weight would press out the board so its end would cover the end of the trapdoor and prevent it from opening. A 1912 Australian silent film about Lee, *The Man They Could Not Hang*, became one of the most profitable Australian films of all time. Fairport Convention released a folk rock opera called *Babbacombe Lee* in 1971. (Nigel Blundell: *The World's Greatest Mistakes*, 1984; Wikipedia).

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

172. THE LAST WITCH



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

In 1944 Helen Duncan became the last person in Britain to be prosecuted for witchcraft.

The "truth"

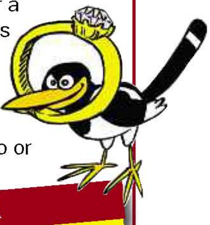
Helen Duncan (1897-1956) was a clairvoyant and "physical medium", controversial even before the events for which she became famous; in 1931, the London Spiritual Alliance pronounced her a fraud, and in 1934 she was convicted of fraudulent mediumship. During WW II she specialised in putting the spirits of dead sailors in touch with their widows. When she revealed the loss of *HMS Barham* to her audience in 1941, before the sinking had officially been announced, supporters hailed this as proof of her powers. In fact, the news had already leaked. In any case, she wasn't prosecuted for that event. It wasn't until 1944 that the Navy finally decided to close down what it saw as a cruel racket. A sting operation caught Duncan faking ectoplasm during a séance in Portsmouth, and she was tried and imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act 1735. This was not, despite the name, a law against witchcraft; after 1735, being a witch was no longer an offence – making money by *pretending* to be one was. It was routinely used against fake mediums, including Duncan, until replaced by the Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951.

Sources

Loose cannons by Graeme Donald (Osprey, 2009); www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/toil-and-trouble-the-last-witch-789353.html; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-18456106; www.helenduncan.org.uk/helen.html

Disclaimer

It should be noted that the standard view of this case is not universally held. To this day, some spiritualists campaign for a posthumous pardon for Mrs Duncan, whom they believe was persecuted to death by a paranoid Establishment.



Mythchaser

A reader writes, succinctly: "Magpies steal jewellery: yes, no or maybe? Please can you find a final answer to this."

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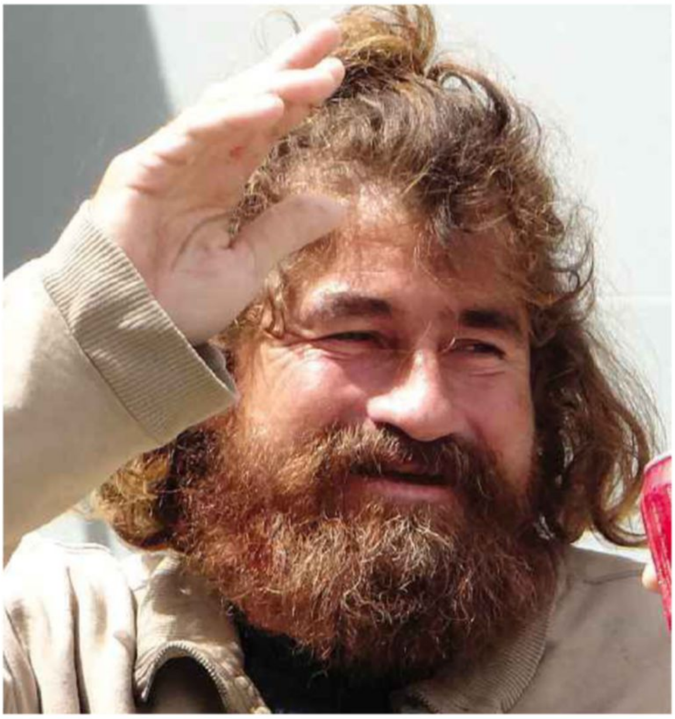
HELL IN THE PACIFIC

Castaway claims he drifted for 14 months and 6,500 miles and survived by drinking turtle blood



HILARY HOSIA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

"CAMARONEROS de la COSTA"
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JOHAN ORDONEZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Jose Salvador Alvarenga, complete with long hair and beard, seen after his 22-hour boat trip from Ebon atoll to Majuro Hospital. **CENTRE:** The boat of the controversial castaway. **BOTTOM:** The now clean-shaven Alvarenga holds a microphone on his arrival at El Salvador international airport on 11 February.

On 30 January 2014, a battered 24ft (7.3m) fibreglass boat washed up on Ebon atoll, the southernmost tip of the Marshall Islands. It carried a dead turtle and a man with long straggly beard and hair, dressed only in torn underpants, his skin weather-beaten from sun and salt. Shark fisherman José Salvador Alvarenga, 37, had not seen land since drifting 6,500 miles (10,500km) across the Pacific from Mexico for more than 14 months. A local couple, Amy Libokmeto and Russell Laikedrik, fed him three pancakes before ferrying him to the main island in the atoll, where a Norwegian anthropology student used the only solar-powered phone to alert authorities in Majuro, the capital of the Pacific country (pop. 60,000). From there the first word of Alvarenga's epic trip reached the outside world.

On 17 November 2012, Alvarenga set off from Costa Azul, on the coast of Mexico near the border with Guatemala, on a trip to catch blacktip sharks. With him was a new shipmate, Ezequiel Cordoba, aged 22 (or 15 or 24), known as *Piñata*. Several hours later they landed a decent haul, about £70 worth of shark, but they were engulfed in a storm about 25 miles (40km) from the coast and their 75hp engine died. Alvarenga radioed for help. Fellow fishermen recall him cursing the broken engine over the radio and saying he had lost all his equipment. "He sounded desperate," said Hector Arebalo Castellonos, "but there was nothing we could do. We couldn't get back out again for three days because of high winds and high waves. After that we searched for five days, and for a month if we saw a light we would go out to see if anyone was there." Four fishermen are presumed to have died in two other boats that were never heard from again.

Alvarenga drifted westwards into the Pacific, surviving on turtles, fish and seabirds caught with his bare hands. He ate their flesh raw for food; drank their blood when there was no rain, and his own urine when there was no blood. After about four months, Ezequiel, weakened and depressed, lost hope and simply refused to eat. "He just sat on the other side of the boat and decided to pass away," said Alvarenga. After slipping the body over the side, Alvarenga briefly considered taking his own life before mustering the courage to survive, armed only with a knife, as the fishing gear had all been lost in the storm. For the following 10 months he saw no sign of land. He did spot other boats, and frantically waved his arms, but no one noticed him. He was able to take cover from the sun in a plastic fish box. Though the sea was generally placid, he experienced a two-day storm during which waves crashed across the boat and filled it with water. It was the only time he thought he would die. "I didn't feel any pain in the boat – except when there was no water to drink," he said. "I would start to imagine water. I knew that I couldn't drink it from the ocean. Whenever I got really hungry and thirsty a bird would come." Just after he had finished a particularly vicious battle with a seagull and was drinking its blood, he spotted trees on what turned out to be Ebon atoll. "I cried, 'Oh God!' I got to land and had a mountain of sleep. In the morning I woke up and heard a rooster and saw chickens and a small house."

There was initial scepticism regarding his ordeal as he didn't seem emaciated enough to have been at sea so long – but his friends back in Costa Azul had given him the affectionate nickname La Chancha ("The Pig") because of his burly physique, so he had many spare pounds to lose. His friends recognised him when they saw him on television after a haircut. "It's him," said Bellarmino Rodriguez Solis, 64. "He worked for me for a year and I've known him for 10 years." When shown a photograph of the boat beached in the Marshall Islands, he said: "It's my boat. I know the number on the side."

The effects of his ordeal caught up with Alvarenga, who suffered dehydration, back pain and swollen joints, but on 10 February he flew to El Salvador, his home country, which he had left for Mexico several years ago. Back in his birthplace of Garita Palmera, he was reunited with his family. Scientists in Hawaii who had researched ocean currents by computer modelling announced that his drifting ordeal was consistent with their findings. *D.Telegraph, 1-17 Feb, Sunday Telegraph, 2+9 Feb; D.Mail, 3-8 Feb; Metro, 11 Feb 2014.*

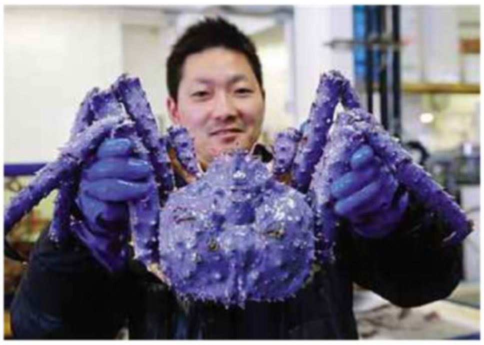
- Three fishermen from an island in the Kiribati group were cast adrift when their engine failed on 4 April 1986. They survived by catching 25 sharks by hand, and were rescued after 119 days. Sick of shark, one night they prayed for a different kind of fish and something fell into the boat: it was a rare species never caught by trawling. It never normally comes to the surface, and lives about 650ft (200m) down [**FT48:16**].

In 1992, two Kiribati fishermen were at sea for 177 days before they landed in Samoa. Another three Kiribati fishermen survived 46 days drifting in 2005 [**FT198:9**]. Two Samoan fishermen survived 132 days – nearly four months – adrift in 2001; two shipmates had died of starvation and been buried at sea [**FT156:17**].

In 2006, three Mexicans were found in a vessel near the Marshalls, nine months after setting out to catch shark. They survived on rainwater, raw fish and seabirds, their hopes buoyed by reading the Bible. In 2010, three teenagers from the Tokelau Islands survived being adrift in the Pacific for 48 days [**FT271:8**].

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden



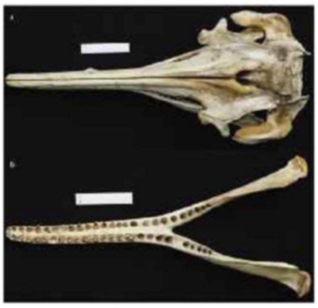
LAVENDER CRAB, DILLY DILLY

The clue is in its name – native to the Bering Sea and a popular species of crustacean for human consumption, the red king crab *Paralithodes camtschaticus* is red in colour... usually. However, a sizeable specimen lately caught off Russia and shipped in a batch to Marusan Ocean Foods in Hokkaido, Japan, was instantly distinguishable not only from all others in the shipment, but also from all others ever recorded, due to its being bright lavender. Indeed, when this unique and extremely striking creature arrived at Marusan Ocean Foods, the seafood wholesaler's president, Kenetsu Mikami, announced in a newspaper interview that despite dealing with crabs for 25 years, he had never seen any crab that colour before.

But how can its remarkable lavender hue be explained? Scientists at a Hokkaido research centre have opined that it may either be the result of a naturally occurring genetic mutation or be due to an anomaly in this particular specimen's diet. Predictably, speculation online has been rather more imaginative, with a favourite theory being that radiation from Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster is responsible. However, this theory seemingly overlooks the basic fact that the crab was caught off Russia, not Japan, and is unique, not one of a number of similar specimens within the king crab population, as might be expected if mutation-inducing radiation were involved. As freak, abnormally coloured specimens have been recorded in several other decapod crustaceans, including lobsters, and as these all appear to be genetically induced, it is most likely that the same explanation is responsible for this lavender-coloured red king crab. Whatever the answer, however, its eye-catching appearance has certainly saved this crustacean's life. Instead of being eaten, it is now on display as a living exhibit at Marusan Ocean Foods. *http://nypost.com 29 Jan; grindtv.com, 31 Jan 2014.*

ALL ABOUT A BOTO

Until very recently, the last new species of freshwater dolphin to be recognised by science was the baiji or Chinese river dolphin *Lipotes vexillifer*, formally described and named in 1918. Now, however, an additional example has been added to the zoological rostra, this time from Brazil's Araguaia-Tocantins basin. Officially described in January 2014, it has been dubbed the Araguaian boto *Inia araguaiaensis*, after the river that it inhabits. Previously assumed to be conspecific with the common boto or Amazon river dolphin *I. geoffrensis*, it has now been shown to be distinguishable from the latter species by its dentition and broader skull (pictured below), as well as by mitochondrial DNA and nuclear microsatellite differences. *plosone.org, 22 Jan 2014.*



PLOS ONE

IS THIS MYSTERY MEGA-BIRD A CANARD?

A mystery bird larger than an ostrich and spied by hundreds of observers before being killed and placed on display is surely not the easiest of creatures to vanish from the pages of history. And yet this is precisely what seems to have happened to the extraordinary-sounding entity documented in the following newspaper report from 1868, which I recently found reprinted on various websites, including Chris Woodyard's excellent 'Haunted Ohio'. Here is the report:

A SINGULAR BIRD

On Sunday of last week a novelty in the bird line was killed in Kentucky, opposite Mound City, Ill., by a man named Jim Henry, of that city. The Cairo Democrat *[a newspaper in Illinois, not Egypt!] says:*

It is larger than the ostrich, and weighs one hundred and four pounds [47kg]. The body of this wonderful bird is covered with snow white down, and its head is of a fiery red. The wings of deep black, measure fifteen feet [4.6m] from tip to tip, and the bill, of a yellow color, twenty-four inches [60cm]. Its legs are slender and sinewy, pea green in color and measure forty-eight inches [1.2m] in length. One of the feet resembles that of a duck, and the other that of a turkey. Mr. Harney [this name is interchangeable with Henry, depending upon which website's version of this report is consulted] shot it at a distance of one hundred yards [90m], from the topmost branch of a dead tree where it was perched, preying upon a full sized sheep that it had carried from the ground.

This strange species of bird, which is said to have existed extensively during the days of the mastodon, is almost entirely extinct — the last one having been seen in the State of New York during the year 1812. Potter has it on exhibition in his office at Mound City. Its flight across the town and river was witnessed by hundreds of citizens.

Fascinating though it is, there is so much to doubt in this bizarre report that it is difficult to know where to begin. A bird bigger than an ostrich eating a full-grown sheep in a tree, sporting a 15ft wingspan plus legs of differing appearance, and once-common many millennia ago but now reduced to this single, last-known, and soon-afterwards-demised specimen – it all sounds far more like the fanciful product of a journalistic hoax than anything engendered by Mother Nature, that's for sure. Who, moreover, is Mr Potter, and why are there no follow-up reports or pictures, especially as this feathered behemoth was supposedly exhibited dead by Potter? Even its slayer's name changes within (and also between different websites' versions of) the report. Nevertheless, just on the very slim off-chance that there really is more (rather than less) to this strange story than meets the eye, if any *FT* readers have extra information, we'd love to hear from you! *Columbus [GA] Daily Enquirer, 2 Sept 1868, p.4; hauntedohiobooks.com; wildbirdsbroadcasting.blogspot.co.uk, 1 Dec 2013.*

NECROLOG

This month, we raise the white flag and say sayonara to the Japanese soldier who surrendered 29 years after WWII had ended, and remember a brace of fortean females

HIROO ONODA

This Japanese officer became world famous in March 1974 when he emerged from the mountainous jungle on Lubang Island in the Philippines, where he had hunkered down for the previous 29 years, refusing to believe that World War II had come to an end in August 1945 [**FT54:24, 100:19**]. He was born into a samurai family that brought him up in the strict *bushido* code of self-sacrifice. Before arriving in the Philippines at the end of 1944, he attended the Nakano School in Tokyo, the key training camp for Intelligence agents, where he was trained in propaganda, sabotage, martial arts (including aikido) and guerrilla warfare. In the closing weeks of the war, Second Lieutenant Onoda became cut off on Lubang as US troops came north. He had orders not to surrender. "Every Japanese soldier was prepared for death, but as an intelligence officer I was ordered to conduct guerrilla warfare and not to die," he said in a 2010 interview. "If I could not carry [the order] out, I would feel shame. I am very competitive."

Onoda surveyed military facilities and engaged in sporadic clashes with local residents. To begin with, he had three enlisted men with him: Corporal Shoichi Shimada, Private Yuichi Akatsu, and Private First Class Kinshichi Kozuka. They built bamboo huts and survived on rice, bananas, coconuts, rats, birds, and dried beef (from cattle shot during farm raids). Tormented by tropical heat, rats and mosquitoes, they patched their uniforms and kept their rifles in working order.

Akatsu surrendered in 1949 and returned to Japan, letting it be known that there were still soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army fighting on. Shimada was killed in an encounter with a police search party in 1954, a fate that befell Kozuka in October 1972. Onoda and Kozuka had been officially declared dead in 1959. Like Shoichi Yokoi, a Japanese soldier who was found on the island of Guam in 1972, Onoda dismissed reports declaring the war's end as Allied propaganda. He dodged search parties sent to find him and ignored leaflets dropped by Japan. "The leaflets they dropped were filled with mistakes so I judged it was a plot by the Americans," he said.

Onoda was finally located on 20 February 1974 by Norio Suzuki, a Japanese hippie traveller who had read of the killing of Kozuka and concluded that he wanted to search for "Lieutenant Onoda, a panda, and the Abominable Snowman, in that order". Where the Filipino police and military had failed, Suzuki succeeded in four days. The small, wiry guerrilla fighter, his tattered uniform camouflaged with twigs and leaves, set his rifle on the young adventurer, but was assuaged by his calm approach. "Onoda-san," said Suzuki, "the Emperor and the people of Japan are worried about you."

Onoda would not surrender until he had a direct order from his commanding officer, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi. The following month Suzuki returned with Taniguchi, by then a bookseller. He assured Onoda that the Imperial command had ceased all combat activity, and he should lay down his arms. Not long afterwards, Onoda saluted the Japanese flag and presented his ceremonial Samurai sword to Ferdinand Marcos, President of the Philippines, who granted him a pardon and handed the weapon back – although many in Lubang never forgave him for the 30 people he killed during his campaign on the island, believing them to be enemy combatants. He had kept his rifle, hand grenades, 500 rounds of ammunition and sword in impeccable order.

Onoda returned to Japan, but was shocked to find it had changed beyond recognition, and was appalled by the loss of traditional values. He felt defeat had broken the countrey's spirit. He was given a military pension and signed a £97,000 contract for a ghost-written memoir, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War* (1974), which was a bestseller. After struggling to adapt, in 1975 he moved to a Japanese colony in São Paulo, Brazil, where he became a cattle farmer. In 1976 he married Machie Onuku, a Japanese tea ceremony teacher. In 1984 the couple returned to Japan and founded the Onoda Nature School, a survival skills youth camp. On a visit to Lubang in 1996 Onoda gave £6,000 to an island school.

Onoda was one of the last *Znru nipponhei* (Japanese Holdouts), and certainly the most celebrated. After him there was Private Teruo Nakamura, a soldier from Taiwan who served in the Imperial Japanese Army. Nakamura was found growing crops alone on the Indonesian island of Morotai in December 1974. He was repatriated to Taiwan where he died in 1979. In 1997 an 85-year-old Japanese soldier, calling himself Sangrayban, was discovered on the Philippine island of Mindoro. He had arrived in 1943 with orders not to surrender and had been living among the Mangyan tribe for 54 years. He had a wife from the tribe who had given him four children and he was in very good health, but had no intention of returning to Japan [**FT100:19**]. In 2005 there were claims that two former Japanese soldiers in their 80s were still in hiding in the mountains on the Philippine island of Mindanao, reportedly afraid that they would be court-martialled for desertion if they gave themselves up. The story, however, turned out to be a hoax.

Hiroo Onoda, defiant Japanese soldier, born Wakayama prefecture, southern Japan, 19 Mar 1922; died Tokyo 16 Jan 2014, aged 91.

JIJI PRESS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

JOYCE KEARNEY

Kearney was one of the early pioneers of women in Bigfooting. She is mentioned in John Green's *Sasquatch: The Apes Among Us* (1978) and Barbara Wasson's *Sasquatch Apparitions* (1979) for having unearthed historical newspaper clippings on the subject. Joyce was a correspondent of the late George Haas, who published one of the first newsletters on the topic, the *Bigfoot Bulletin.* She also sponsored several Bigfoot conferences. A registered nurse by profession, her intellectual curiosity about Bigfoot led her on many library searches for old travellers' tales in which wild hairy men (or something similar) were mentioned. She ended up doing decades of research, travelling from the mountains of California to sites of historical Bigfoot significance in Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Texas and Ohio. Noted Bigfooter Tom Yamarone, a close friend, said: "She will be remembered for her kind, caring and generous soul and vivacious spirit".

Joyce Kearney, Bigfoot researcher, born Cincinnati, Ohio 2 April 1943; died San Francisco 20 Sept 2013, aged 70.

Daniel Perez, Bigfoot Times

EILEEN COLY

Coly was the daughter of the celebrated Irish trance medium Eileen J Garrett (1893-1970), who founded the Parapsychology Foundation in 1951. Eileen Jr spent World War II in England, settling in the United States in l947, where she worked at Creative Age Press and *Tomorrow* magazine (both started by her mother) before joining the Parapsychology Foundation in l966, becoming president in 1970 on the death of her mother. She held the post for 41 years, retiring in 2011. She shared her mother's vision, formulating a multi-disciplinary international approach to the study of psychic phenomena with an emphasis on scientific methodology and education. By her French-born husband, the late Robert R Coly, she had two children, Lisette and Robert Louis. Lisette Coly continues to run the Parapsychology Foundation in Greenport and Manhattan.

Eileen Coly, née Garrett, parapsychologist, born England 1916; died Manhattan 18 Nov 2013, aged 97.

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Jason Airey, 39, returned to his family home in Carlisle, Cumbria, on 2 May 2013. "He was just his normal self," said his father Dennis. "I think he had enjoyed himself in town. He had been shopping and said he was going upstairs to get changed." When he failed to reappear, his mother Anne went upstairs and found him unconscious. She fetched her husband to help. "I got hold of him and his shirt was clammy," Dennis Airey told an inquest. "His face was blue. I could feel a faint pulse on his neck." Paramedics tried to revive him, but he never regained consciousness and died at the Cumberland Infirmary two days later.

Next to Jason on the bed was an opened box emblazoned with "Pandora's Box" in red letters, containing a packet of unopened cannabis. (In Greek mythology Zeus gave the box to Pandora, the first woman on Earth, with instructions never to open it – but of course she did, releasing all the evils of the world. Actually, the box was a *pithos*, a large jar, but Erasmus, who made a translation, misread pithos as *pyxis*, meaning a box.) No drugs were found in Jason's body. According to his father, "He hadn't taken any drugs after having a bad experience with ecstasy 13 years ago." A post-mortem examination found his heart had stopped, which had caused his organs to fail; but tests were unable to establish why. "There is a possibility that he had a fatal cardiac arrhythmia – a change in his heartbeat," said coroner Robert Chapman. The term "Sudden Adult Death Syndrome" merely seeks to label such an occurrence without advancing our understanding. *D.Telegraph, 12 Nov 2013.*

Pastor Franck Kabele told his congregation in Gabon that he was capable of re-enacting the miracles of Jesus. To demonstrate this, Kabele, 35, took his flock on to the beach in the capital city of Libreville, and told them that he would cross the Kombo estuary – normally a 20-minute boat ride – by walking on the water. However, by the second step into the water he was completely submerged and never returned.

This is not the first such fatality in Africa. At Ibadan Zoo in south-west Nigeria, a self-styled prophet claimed to be able to do what the biblical Daniel did by walking into a den full of lions. The zookeepers warned him not to, but he saw them as nothing more than enemies of progress. In front of a crowd of spectators, he put on a long red robe and proceeded to enter the cage full of lions. Within seconds, the lions ripped him to pieces. *All Christian News, 2 Jan; jewsnews.co.il, 3 Jan 2014. News Examiner (Ireland), 4 Jan 2014.*

Three men were burnt to death in Madagascar by a mob who suspected they were trafficking human organs after an eight-year-old boy, reported missing on 27 September, was washed up dead on a beach, with genitals and tongue missing. Sebastien Judalet, 38, a French bus driver, and Roberto Gianfala, a French-Italian in his 50s, were hunted down and killed by residents of Nosy Be, a tourist island resort in Madagascar's north-west. Local media reported that the protesters had found human organs in a fridge in the building where the Europeans were staying. "They confessed under torture [by the mob] to organ trafficking," said the deputy commander of the paramilitary police, Gen Guy Randriamaro Bobin. Earlier, the mob had stormed a police station and torched eight police houses, accusing them of protecting the Europeans. Judalet and Gianfala were tortured before being thrown alive on a bonfire on Ambatoloaka beach. A few miles away, an AFP reporter found a Malagasy man, said to be the dead boy's uncle, who had been "lynched and burned to death" for the same alleged offence. *[R] BBC News, 3 Oct; D.Telegraph, Sun, 4 Oct; D.Mail, 4+9 Oct 2013.*

Lawrence Loeffler, 83, shot his wife dead in Oregon after she put the ketchup lid on too tightly. *Sun, 22 Sept 2013.*

A family of four were shot dead by a neighbour infuriated by the barking of their dogs. Michael Guzzo had put up posters in his townhouse complex in Phoenix, Arizona, reminding other residents of the rules on keeping pets and the fines that could be levied. Neighbours said that after this failed, he 'flipped', killing Bruce Moore, 66, his daughter Renée Moore, 36, her husband Michael, Renée's son Shannon, 17, and their two dogs, before killing himself. *D.Express, 30 Oct 2013.*

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NAZI SPACE ALIENS RUN NSA?

When, in 2010, Wikileaks published 250,000 US State Department cables dating back to the 1960s, one ufologist asked plaintively why not one major UFO secret had been revealed in the mass dump of secret data. Now former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden has gone one step further with his release to the *Guardian* and other news sources of two million top-secret documents, a move that the paper's Luke Harding calls "the most explosive intelligence leak in history". This treasure trove blows the whistle on how the NSA, and its British counterpart GCHQ, is bugging all of us via the Prism programme that gives the agency direct access to traffic on Google, Facebook and via other US-based Internet companies. But so far Snowden's revelations have failed to mention the alien presence on Earth that the Disclosure brigade would have us believe is the *real* 'ultimate secret'.

So, following the example set by the MJ-12 hoaxer, someone decided it was time to stitch the NSA story together with the UFO myth. This time, the source is a bogus Russian document claiming that a 'shadow government' of extraterrestrials has secretly run the US government ever since WWII, when Hitler built up his U-boat fleet "with alien assistance". The aliens are now holed up at Area 51 with President Obama as their willing dupe and are plotting to use the omnipresent NSA to take over the world. Snowden fled to Russia in June 2013 and, according to the story, handed over his proof to agents from the Federal Security Services (FSB), formerly known as the KGB. In January, a summary of an FSB report appeared on the ultra-fringe conspiracy website www.whatdoesitmean.com. It claimed to provide "incontrovertible proof" that "an alien/extra-terrestrial intelligence agenda" is driving US foreign policy. The author of the article, Sorcha Faal, is believed to be a pseudonym of a CIA operative skilled in spreading disinformation. In this case he scored a direct hit when the semi-official Iranian news agency Fars swallowed the story whole, claiming the contents of the FSB document had been confirmed by the former Canadian defence minister Paul Hellyer during a live interview on Russian TV. Hellyer, Fars claimed, had been consulted by the FSB during his Russian trip on the accuracy of Faal's story. Both Hellyer and Disclosure mouthpiece Stephen Bassett have distanced themselves from what they believe is a CIA plot to smear them. We agree with Max Fisher of the *Washington Post*, who described this hall of mirrors as "highly entertaining". *Washington Post blogs (Max Fisher), 13 Jan 2014, citing Fars News, 12 Jan: http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13921021000393*

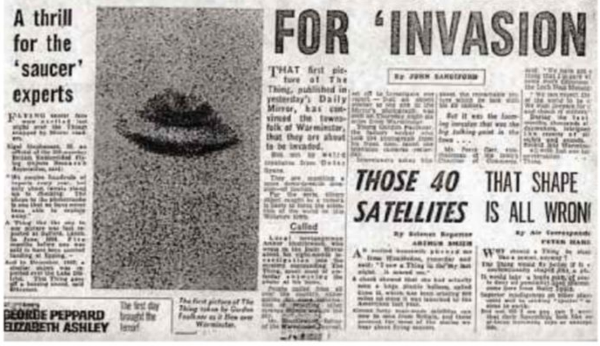
THE SWISS X-FILES

The example set by the British government in opening 52,000 pages of UFO files at The National Archives since 2008 is having a domino effect elsewhere in Europe. The French, Irish and Danish military have already opened up their surviving records, but the Swiss and German governments have always denied holding records on sightings over central Europe. This always seemed improbable due to West Germany's pivotal role as the eyes and ears of NATO forces along the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. But it seems ufologists who see denials as evidence of a cover-up need to swat up on their archive skills and learn how to use a search engine. The Swiss government had claimed any documents they held on UFOs had been destroyed and searches under 'UFOs' in the Federal Archives in Berne were unsuccessful. It turns out the 'missing' papers had simply been filed under the Swiss term *fliegende teller* ('flying plates') rather than the popular English acronym. When *Mysteries* magazine editor Luc Guarantor searched using the Swiss phrase he discovered dozens of 'lost' files from the 1950s and 1960s. They revealed the air department of the Swiss Army began collecting reports from military pilots in the 1950s using a special questionnaire. Reports were collected from police and civil aviation sources and studied by the military authorities. Among them were details of a sighting by police officers of a shiny metallic ball-shaped object over Eschenbach near Lucerne in 1955. Meanwhile, the German Society for UFO Research has discovered the Federal Government also holds files, including some collected by its Foreign Office, but so far it has refused to release them. *http://grenzwissenschaft-aktuell.blogspot.ch/2013/07/forscher-findet-verschollene-ufo-akten.html*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO 'THE THING'

2014 marks the 50th anniversary of the Warminster UFO mystery that made the small Wiltshire market town a centre of pilgrimage for flying-saucerers during the 1960s and 1970s. From Christmas 1964, if local journalist Arthur Shuttlewood can be believed, the town was virtually under siege from 'The Thing', a mysterious airborne sound. Soon afterwards, visits from flying saucers and nocturnal lights became as regular as clockwork. UFO watchers camped out on Cradle Hill, which borders the British Army firing range on Salisbury Plain, every weekend and bank holiday in search of the space people. By the 1970s interest had waned, and until recently visitors were perplexed to find no mention of the 'mystery' in the town's Tourist Information literature. But times are a'changing thanks to Warminster stalwart Kevin Goodman, who revived the annual August bank holiday skywatch tradition in 2007.

In February this year, when BBC2's peripatetic antiques show *Flog It!* visited Warminster, presenter Paul Martin made the town's UFO legend the centrepiece of the show. Kevin will speak about 'the Warminster Mystery at 50' at the BUFORA Conference, to be held in the Glastonbury Assembly Rooms, on Saturday, 30 August. Afterwards, pilgrims can join a coach trip to Cradle Hill and take a trip back into how ufology was practised in the good old days. *Kevin Goodman's Warminster Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pages/UFO-Warminster/174632342638283; tickets for the BUFORA conference: http://bufora.org.uk/CONFERENCE%3A-GLASTONBURY-2014.php*



District made famous by The Thing prepares for a rush of touris

WARMINSTER GETS READY FOR 'INVASION

A thrill for the 'saucer' experts

THAT first picture of The Thing, published in yesterday's Daily Mirror, has convinced the townsfolk of Warminster, that they are about to be invaded.

Called

THOSE 40 SATELLITES

THAT SHAPE IS ALL WRON

GEORGE PEPPARD ELIZABETH ASHLEY

The first day brought the terror!

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES ON CASES THAT CAN BE SEEN AS ALIEN ABDUCTIONS OR NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

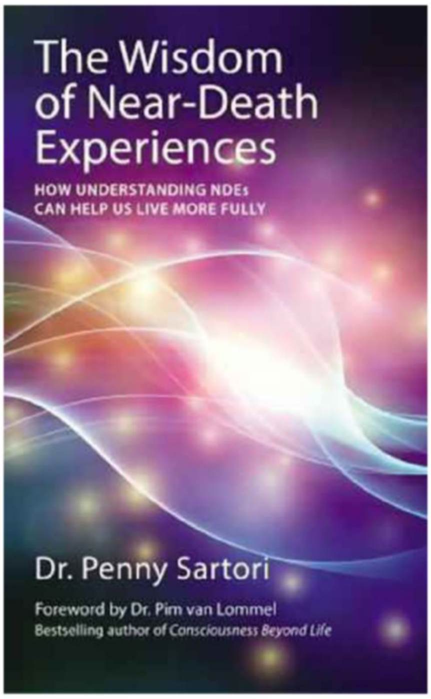
AT THE EDGE OF EXPERIENCE

In **FT303** I wrote about a recent case in which a woman described floating upwards towards a lighted 'UFO'. The event was ambiguous in a number of ways. As I noted, it could have been interpreted as a vivid waking dream, or a form of panic attack called VVS (vaso-vagal syncope), which involves physiological changes in the brain triggered by stress. However, it also has the obvious hallmarks of two fortean phenomena that are extensively documented yet interpreted very differently.

One of these, of course, is the alien abduction (or CE4), where the light towards which you float is interpreted as a UFO. The other is the 'tunnel of light' into which those who undergo NDEs (near-death experiences) feel themselves being drawn, often following a serious injury like a car crash or a heart attack. Tellingly, though, only *fear* of serious injury, not proximity to death, is needed to cause an NDE. If two seemingly very different interpretations are being placed on similar experiences (alien abduction and a glimpse of an afterlife) it poses the awkward question of whether either conclusion is the correct one or both are false assumptions about a phenomenon which has another, different resolution. Having asked readers for further episodes that might assist, and with publication in February of a new study into British NDE cases, it seems appropriate to look again at where we stand.

Some telling points arise in a case recorded by Lancashire researcher Joe Dormer. It involved a college student and his mother. At dusk on a winter's evening they were drawing the curtains at their Rochdale home when they both saw a huge cylindrical object floating outside. It had a line of windows on the edge, through which were visible some 'alien' figures in silvery suits. They watched this spectacle for about a minute before it vanished. Neither witness was able to move or cry out, feeling paralysed in some way. After the encounter, they were amazed to find that instead of moments an hour had passed.

This case has many key elements of the UFO mystery, where it is often presumed that 'missing time' has been blocked from recall by some 'entity'. Hypnosis may be conducted to retrieve the 'missing' memory of being abducted. However, if we draw back a step, the most we can really say is that these witnesses were experiencing a sort of perceptual anomaly where awareness of time is distorted and there are other physiological and psychological disturbances. Ascribing the cause to a UFO, and then adding the results of a contentious experimental protocol such as hypnosis, is risky; it's possible we have the whole thing the wrong way around. What if the physiological disturbances are what *cause* us to perceive something as a UFO? As I showed in **FT310**, something less than extraordinary in the sky can, in some cases, be transformed into something perceived as a spaceship – even one with alien occupants.


The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences
HOW UNDERSTANDING NDEs CAN HELP US LIVE MORE FULLY
Dr. Penny Sartori
Foreword by Dr. Pim van Lommel
Bestselling author of Consciousness Beyond Life

These events could fit an alien abduction or an NDE

The problem of assuming an origin based primarily on the *interpretation* of an experience is obvious from the following two cases summarised from my files.

Graham from Lancashire was lying in bed late at night when he became paralysed and unable to move or speak. There was a buzzing sensation inside his head. Above him was a bright light and he was drawn towards it, finding himself in a room standing beside a bed and close to a human-like figure that told him "directly into his mind" that he must return. He then saw the Earth below and the roof of his house, before he "came to" on his bed.

Reg from Yorkshire was also on his bed when he felt a pressure on his chest and saw two strange figures beside him. They were humanoid, with unusual eyes. They "spoke to his mind" and told him he could go with them. He then floated up through the roof and saw a glow above. The next thing he knew, he was in a room next to a bed where he was given a message and told to return. He found himself back on the bed, struggling to breathe and paralysed for a short while.

These sequences of events are very similar, and you can make them fit either an alien abduction or an NDE. Graham's was reported as an NDE, and the figure believed to be his deceased father. Reg thought he had undergone an alien contact and been sucked into a UFO by extraterrestrials. There are other options, with suggestions of sleep paralysis in both cases meaning they could be vivid dreams during REM sleep. Here, consciousness can awaken briefly to perceive normally hidden mechanisms that deny us movement during dream sleep (as a precaution against jumping off roofs and so on). As a long-term sufferer of VVS, I also recognise the signs of an attack in which you can be conscious yet unable to move, as your brain suffers a sudden drop in blood supply caused by the condition. It can happen while you are asleep; you lose consciousness and awake later with an apparent 'discontinuity' in your perception of reality. It feels 'supernatural' but isn't.

This leaves us with a dilemma. Are these many cases 'really' NDEs or abductions, or both? Are some NDEs being mistaken for CE4s, or vice versa? Or are our minds simply using these two ideas as a framework into which to fit symptoms caused by physiological and perceptual cognitions occurring inside the body and brain because of stress or medical emergency? Are aliens, angels or dead relatives just personal interpretations of the same physiological events being perceived in ways that match our particular beliefs?

Or, indeed, what if all these things are just attempts to fit into an everyday 'real world' context unfathomable events perceived at the edge of perception when our brain-structured view of material reality meets the wider multiverse in which consciousness may operate? Meeting dead relatives or going for rides in a UFO could simply be our structured brain's best guess about such bizarre experiences, conjured up later when the anchors of the real world take hold.

During February 2014, Dr Penny Sartori, an intensive care nurse from South Wales, published her study based on 17 years of recorded observations of dying patients and the extraordinary perceptions she watched them undergo. Her book, *The Wisdom of Near Death Experiences* (Watkins), offers many cases that make a UFO researcher take note. Again and again in her accounts there are things that I have seen mirrored in cases that get reported as UFO abductions.

Examples include the buzzing/humming noises Sartori reports her patients as hearing as they float upwards into an NDE. Others are unexpected problems getting watches to work after an NDE, or a feeling of oneness with the Universe that transforms the way people live post-recovery. These very same things crop up in cases that have been reported as alien contacts. Even the cases of 'life review', where images of the past flash before an NDE witness prior to their return to 'life', appears in CE4s as well – though usually interpreted as images being 'planted' into the abductee's mind by the aliens thought to be in control of the encounter.

The deeper I look into these parallels within Sartori's fascinating study, the more I think there is something important waiting to be uncovered from such connections.

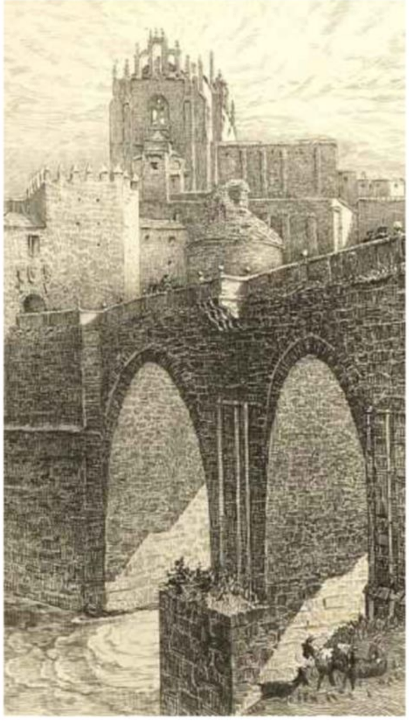
PILGRIMS FROM HELL

MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO crosses herself and goes in search of Galicia's hooded harbingers of death – the lost souls of the *Santa Compaña* or Holy Company.

During his Spanish adventures, 19th century English travel author George Borrow heard of a spine-chilling legend that he would later include in his popular work *The Bible in Spain* (1843; an illustration from its pages appears below). Facing a vast desolate moor in Galicia, a region of strong Pagan tradition in the northwest, Borrow asked his local guide whether they would be able to reach the nearby village of Corcubión that night. The guide refused to carry on walking any further: "We shall in no manner reach Corcuvión [sic] to-night, and I by no means like the appearance of this moor. The Sun is rapidly sinking, and then, if there come on a haze, we shall meet the Estadea". Prompted by Borrow, the guide described the nature of his fear: "I have met (it) but once, and it was upon a moor something like this. I was in company with several women, and a thick haze came on, and suddenly a thousand lights shone above our heads in the haze, and there was a wild cry". His previous experience terrified him enough to threaten abandoning Borrow to his fate: "I tell you frankly, my master, that if we meet [the Estadea], I shall leave you at once, and then I shall run and run till I drown myself in the sea".[1]

These words capture the superstitious fear inspired by a mythical belief that has kindled the Spanish imagination for centuries: the *Santa Compaña* or Holy Company, as it is most commonly referred to. Although the legend appears in other areas of Spain, it is in rainy, misty Galicia, a region with strong Celtic influences, where it is still told and feared the most. Galicians are reputed to be the most superstitious people in the country, and their attitude towards the paranormal is encapsulated in the traditional saying "*Eu non creo nas meigas, pero habelas, hainas*" – "I don't believe in witches but they surely exist". Pagan folklore and Catholicism have coexisted in everyday life for centuries, shaping deeply rooted legends that persist to this day, especially in rural areas.

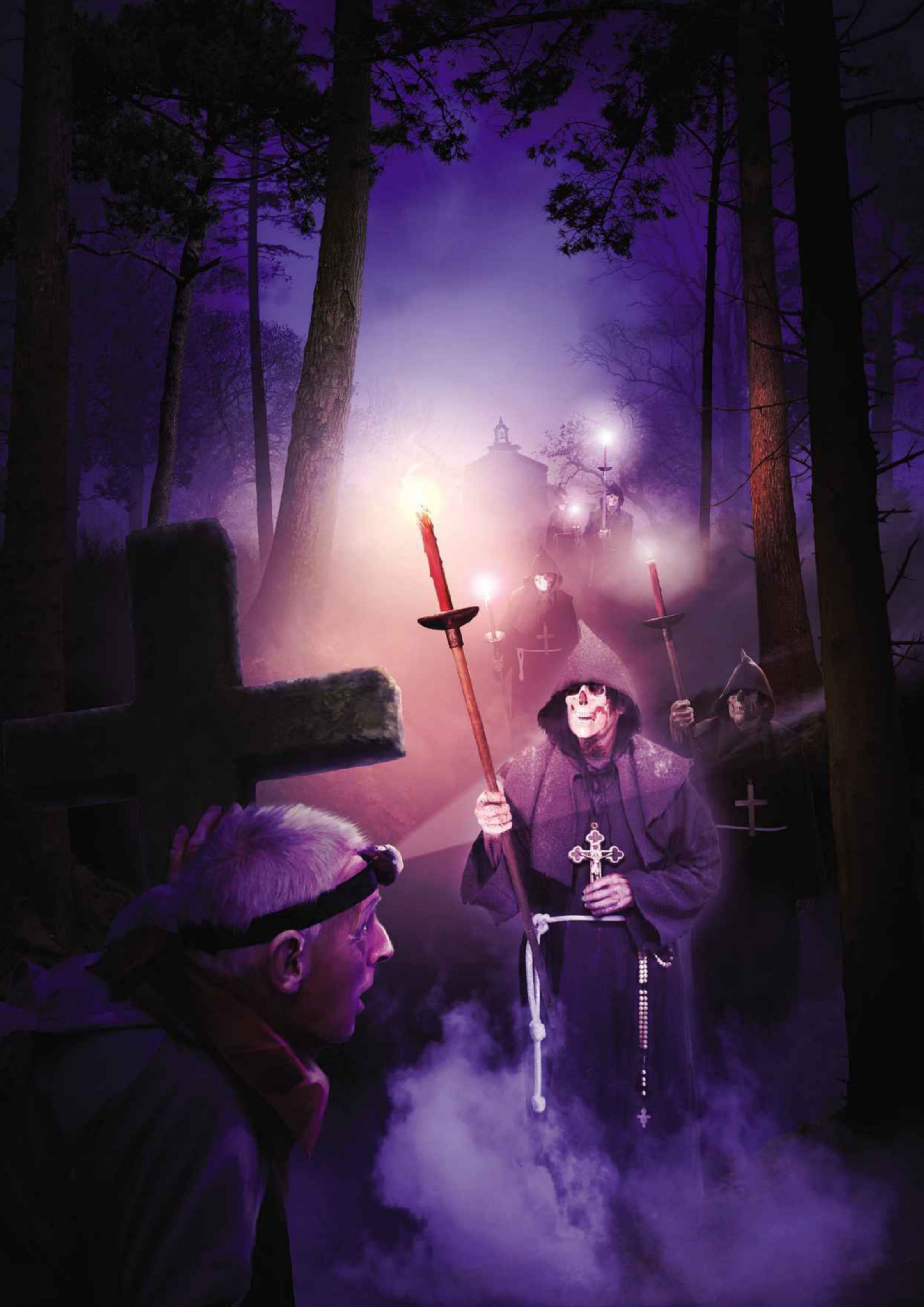
THESE DEAD SOULS HAVE THE POWER TO DRAG THE LIVING AWAY WITH THEM

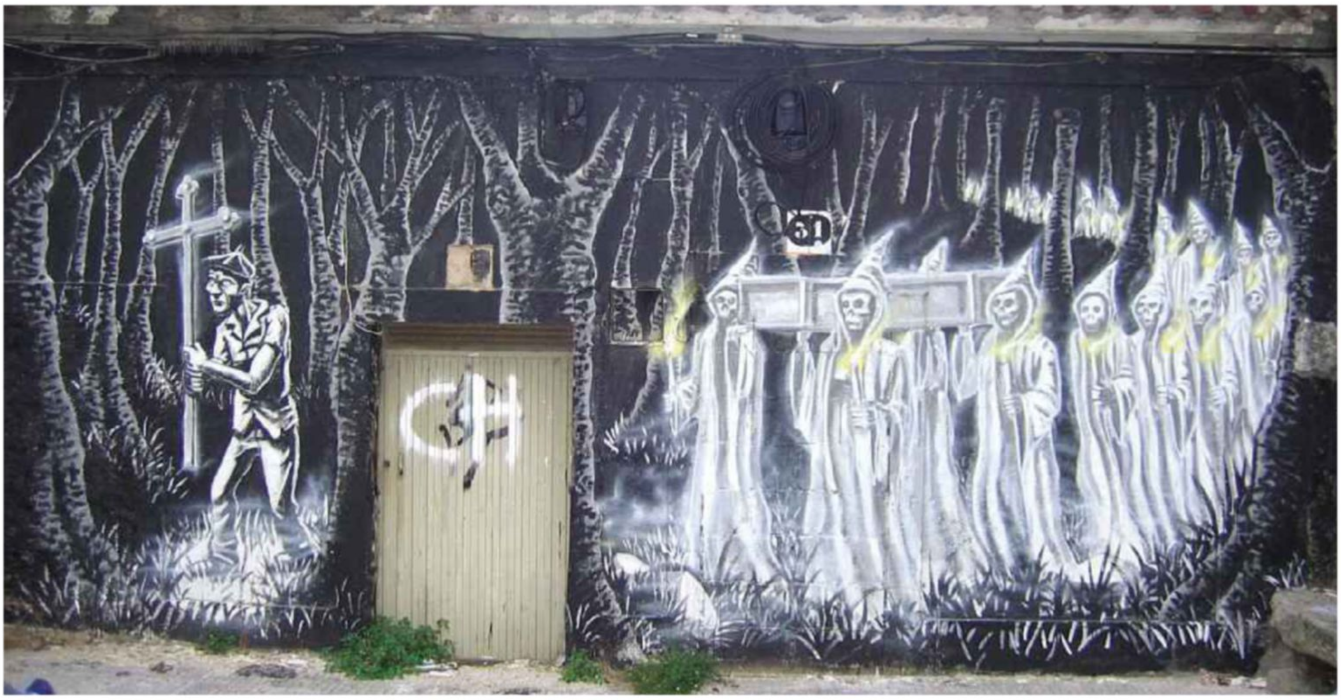


As Borrow's guide recalls, the *Compaña* wanders around moors and forests once the Sun has set, and has a preference for foggy nights. The smell of wax and the dim glow of a row of candles serve as a forewarning of their approach. Dogs bark and howl, cats creep away in terror. The candle bearers are dressed in black (or white, depending on the reports), their features shadowed by hooded tunics. The procession marches in a column or two, reciting a litany in Latin. If a traveller comes into sight and interrupts their ritual, they will stop to offer him a candle. But don't let their pious appearance fool you. These penitents are not human: they are a procession of dead souls that have the power to drag the living away with them on an endless pilgrimage. A traveller must not speak to them or hold the candle he's offered, or he will see his own flesh decay before his eyes; turned into a skeleton, he will forever be condemned to follow them.

Like the Irish banshee or the English black dog, the spirits of the *Compaña* are also harbingers of death. In Galician oral tradition there are many stories of terrified villagers who find the procession knocking on the door of a neighbour who will die a few days later. In most cases, the witness recognises the features of deceased locals under the black hoods, which suggests that every town has its own particular procession. In the

FACING PAGE ILLUSTRATION: ALEXANDER TOMLINSON





ABOVE: The *Santa Compaña* on parade in some street art. **BELOW:** Gonzalo de Berceo, whose writings contain the first Spanish literary reference to such a procession.

nearby region of Asturias, where the Holy Company is known as *La Güestia*, the spirits walk three times around the house of the doomed, who will become ill and die shortly afterwards. Occasionally the stories describe the procession carrying an uncovered coffin in which the astral body of the ill-fated individual lies, a precursor of their funeral cortège.

This aspect of the *Compaña* as a herald of death is only visible to those who have the gift of second sight, or those who, during their baptism, were accidentally rubbed with the consecrated oil for the anointing of the sick. The priest's macabre mistake, it's said, makes these individuals more sensitive to the frontiers between this world and the world of the dead. [2] But even individuals without psychic abilities will see the Holy Company at least once in their lives: on their deathbed, when the procession comes to escort them to the Otherworld, finally willing to reveal its secret – the knowledge of what lies beyond the threshold of death.

THE DEAD TRAVEL TOGETHER

Early written sources provide useful information when trying to trace the roots of the myth. The first known reference in Spanish literature to a phantasmal procession by a crossroads appears in *El Milagro de Teófilo* (c. 1260) by Gonzalo de Berceo, a deacon considered to be the first Spanish poet known by name. In the story, the main character, Teófilo, visits a Jew (anti-Semitism was common across Europe in the Middle Ages, and Jews were frequently demonised in stories at the time) who acts as a mediator for his pact with the Devil to achieve a position of power within the Church. During this process he witnesses what he refers to as the *hueste antigua* or "ancient host", a group of demonic figures led by the Devil himself: "He saw people coming… carrying lit candles/ with their king [the Devil] in the middle; they were all ugly and lightless".

Similarly, in the anonymous epic *Poema de Fernán González (c.* 1260-1266), the author compares the count Don Fernando with the Devil, followed by his servants in a ghostly cortege. The phrase *hueste antigua*, that appears in many subsequent works, is the adaptation that the newborn Spanish language made of the Latin *hostis antiquus.* It is also the etymological origin of the terms *estantigua* or *Güestia*, still used to describe the Holy Company in some areas of Spain. Interestingly, the word *antiquus*, meaning "ancient", was applied to describe the Devil, or the snake of the Tree of Knowledge, the "ancient serpent" in the Apocalypse of St John, thus taking the implicit meaning of "enemy". The cultural association between the old and the bad is especially obvious in the Spanish phrase that might be translated as: "The Devil knows more because he's old than because he's the Devil". [3]

The image of Satan leading his troops from Hell is, of course, a variation of the myth of the Wild Hunt of Indo-European tradition. Echoing dreadful collective memories of invasions and raids, this myth depicts a phantasmal group of huntsmen riding horses, usually followed by dogs, led by a divinity or a legendary warlord. In Scandinavian countries it was known as Odin's Hunt, in Germany, Wotan's Horde or the *Wildes Heer*, in French, la *Mesnée d' Hellequin*. They all share similar characteristics: a spectral leader, a large party of mounted followers and several preceding signs, what folklorist Anatole LeBraz referred to as "intersigns", of clamour, lightning or dogs barking. Sightings of the Hunt were considered to presage calamity, war, famine or death, and the horsemen were said to abduct passers-by, dragging them off to the realm of the dead.

Some of the earliest references to the Hunt appear in English mediæval literature. In the 1127 *Peterborough Chronicle* there's a report of the Hunt seen between Peterborough and Stamford: "The huntsmen were black, huge, and hideous, and rode on black horses and on black he-goats, and their hounds were jet black, with eyes like saucers… In the night the monks heard them sounding and winding their horns".

Inscribed within the Celto-Germanic mythological cycle, the Wild Hunt is fundamentally associated with the imagery of Death in war cultures, evocative of beliefs of the transit of souls, showing the heroes rising up from the dead and the dead travelling together over the land of the living. In his *Teutonic Mythology* (1877), Jacob Grimm explained how Christianity transformed the leader of the Hunt into a demonic figure guiding a procession of dead souls that had escaped from Hell. Sightings of the Wild Hunt were more frequent between Samhain and Yule, as it was a time consecrated to Odin and Wotan. By demonising the procession, Christianity was using fear to deter people from engaging in Pagan festivals. [4]

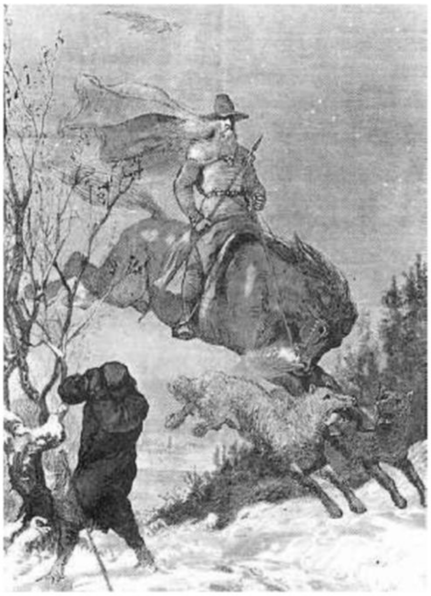
Through the ages, the myth accommodated

other heroic figures, not necessarily divinities, as leaders of the Hunt: King Arthur reputedly appears by a small lane near Cadbury Castle and Sir Francis Drake and his troops roam Dartmoor. Stories of cavalcades of heroes and demons coexisted for many centuries, both sharing the same root. But how did the infernal procession led by Satan or the troop of warriors and warlords become a group of tormented souls?

TRAPPED IN PURGATORY

The story of the corrupt priest Dando, who appears on stormy nights in the bleak moorland around the Parish of St Germans in Cornwall, followed by a pack of furious ember-eyed hounds, is a well-known example of a doomed character who becomes the leader of a Hunt to purge his sins. This variation of the story is reminiscent of the biblical Cain, cursed to wander the Earth and scavenge for all eternity, or the legend of the Wandering Jew, condemned to walk the Earth until the Second Coming after having mocked Jesus on his way to Calvary. In Spain, the most famous example remains the 16th century legend of Count Arnau. In the story, this ruthless Catalan noble had an illicit affair with an abbess and was condemned for all eternity to ride a black horse with flames coming out of its eyes and mouth, followed by a pack of hounds from Hell, while his flesh was eaten by the fire.

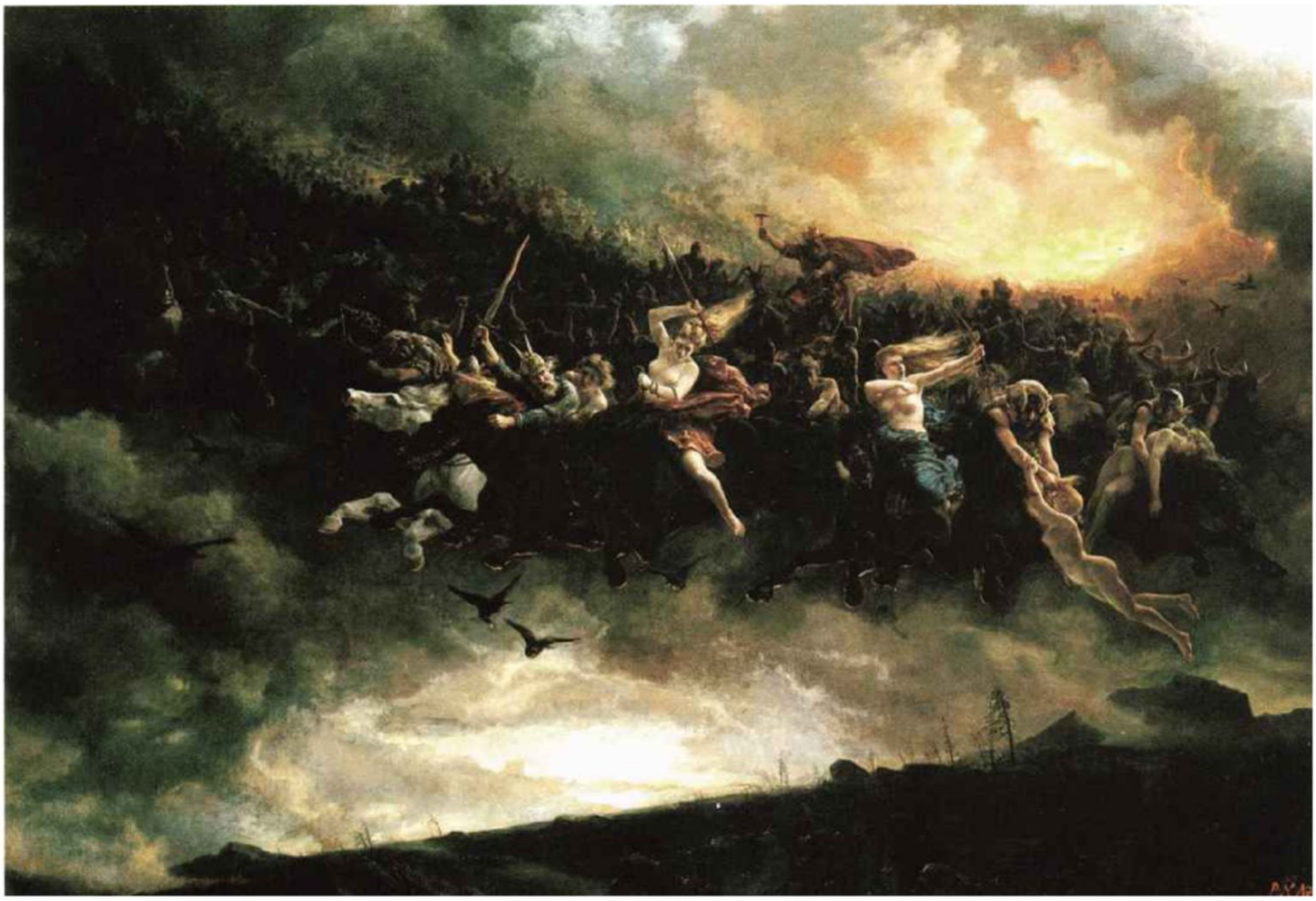
Although all these stories have an ancient root, there is a critical element that produced the particularities of the Holy Company legend. According to anthropologist Carmelo Lisón, this was the introduction of the doctrine of Purgatory by the Catholic Church in the 13th century. This provided a fundamental change to visions of the afterlife: most souls didn't go straight to Heaven or Hell, they would stay for an indeterminate time in Purgatory, in order to purge their sins before they reached the glory of Heaven. The new Catholic dogma helped trigger the Lutheran Reform: for Luther, the idea was little more than an excuse to encourage the faithful to pay for indulgences or masses in which whole families would pray to facilitate the transition of the souls of their beloved ones from Purgatory to Heaven.



SIGHTINGS OF THE WILD HUNT WERE KNOWN TO PRESAGE CALAMITY

But the existence of Purgatory fitted in with an existing ancient tradition: the belief that people who died before their time (such as warriors or suicides) had to remain on Earth, suspended between worlds. The souls of Purgatory were also waiting in a liminal realm, an Otherworld that wasn't as remote as Heaven or Hell; and the relative proximity of this dimension could facilitate interaction between the living and the dead. Hence, the dogma fed into traditional Spanish beliefs – with unorthodox consequences.

The acceptance of the concept of Purgatory involves the distinction between souls that are condemned and souls in penance that still have a possibility of redemption. This distinction is important to understand both *Compañas*: the one that wanders the moors until the end of days, hunting souls and trying to snatch them away, and the one composed of the grieving spirits of the dead, whose function as psychopomps reveals a will to assist the living. Whereas the first usually preserves the names *estantigua* or



TOP: A lone traveller averts his gaze from Wotan and his hunting dogs. **ABOVE:** Odin's Wild Hunt, seen in Peter Nicolai Arbo's 1872 painting *Åsgårdsreien*.

LIVERATUM/CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: There are some 12,000 *cruceiros* (stone or wooden signs of the cross) like this one in Galicia alone, built to offer pilgrims protection against bad spirits.

estadea (from "ancient host"), the second is generally referred to as *Compaña*, *Santa Compaña*, or simply *las ánimas* ("the souls"). But what is most astonishing is that they are all portrayed in a Christian manner. The souls are normally dressed in religious attire, mumbling prayers as they wander. Their members often carry objects with a Christian significance: a wooden cross, a cauldron with holy water or a bell.

All *Compañas* are feared by the superstitious: these souls have already crossed the threshold of death, and having done so they possess a secret that can't be revealed to the living. After death, familiarity is turned into otherness, and this otherness provokes fear.

These processions are always nocturnal. Oral tradition teaches us that walking unprotected at night is not a good idea, as the procession usually warns the living by saying "*Andad de día, que la noche es mía*" ("Walk in the daytime, for the night is mine"), [5] much as the leader of the Wild Hunt screams "*Midden in den weg*!" – or "*Mitte den Weg*" in modern German – to warn passers-by that they won't be harmed if they stay in the middle of the road.

There are many protective rituals against the *Compaña*. Some of them have a clear Catholic symbolism. The cross is a usual sign of defence, and safety is guaranteed by holding a wooden cross or stepping onto the base of a *cruceiro,* a stone or wooden cross sign. There are around 12,000 in Galicia alone, and they were built to protect pilgrims and travellers against "bad" spirits, Christianising places attached to Pagan cults. Most *cruceiros* were placed at crossroads, traditionally regarded as thresholds where the Otherworld encounters the physical world, just as the roads meet. Unprotected crossroads are among the *Compaña's* favourite haunting spots.

THESE SOULS HAVE ALREADY CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF DEATH

Other protective measures have a distinctively Pagan flavour: drawing a circle on the floor and standing in it, throwing salt around oneself or even throwing a black cat, supposing there's one to hand. Children were advised always to carry some breadcrumbs in their pockets to offer to the spirits. And although it might seem strange that incorporeal entities could desire something so mundane, in Celtic tradition bread represents life and is a common method of gaining protection against fairies and other supernatural beings. [6]

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

In some stories of the Holy Company, the leader of the procession is a living person who unknowingly carries out his task every night. The only way of spotting that one has been involved in such unusual night-time activities is an alarming pallor and unexplained tiredness during the day. These nocturnal jaunts will cause the leader's health to progressively deteriorate and he will encounter death unless he finds an incautious traveller to replace him. The idea of a living person who unknowingly joins the procession every night reminds us of the mortal who dances with fairies and falls ill with similar exhaustion and deadly pallor. In both cases, it was probably a way of explaining consumption or tuberculosis. [7] Unsurprisingly, this is not the only similarity between the legend of the *Compaña* and fairy lore. In his *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, WB Yeats associated Fairyland with the space between Heaven and Hell; exactly what Catholics called Purgatory. Fairyland has its own late mediæval evolution of the Wild Hunt, the Fairy Ræd, a fairy cavalcade in which souls are chased as prey. Variations on this theme are the Welsh legend of Gwyn ap Nudd, king of the fair folk who harvests human souls, and the tale of King Herla, who, after visiting the court of a dwarf king as a wedding guest, discovers that he's been gone for two centuries and must now wander for all eternity.

Although the essential nature of fairies has been widely discussed, folklore sums up

LUIS MIGUEL BUGALLO SÁNCHEZ/CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: People take on the role of the *Santa Compaña* at the *Feira Medieval* held each year in the important pilgrim destination of Santiago de Compostela.

many methods of protection against them. Some tales recount interactions between the world of the living and the world of the fairies, which may end tragically, like that of King Herla. The moral of such stories is that the two worlds are meant to be kept separate, keeping an order imposed by Nature or God.

From Persephone's journey to Hades to *Back to the Future*, oral tradition, folklore and storytelling tell us that when a living person encounters an Otherworld, it is very important not to alter that dimension in any way. Speaking to the inhabitants of the other realm or even interacting with material objects can prove fatal. This moral teaching also comes across in the popular legend known as *Misa de las Ánimas* ("mass of the souls"), closely related to the *Compaña*.

The story begins with someone who walks around deserted town paths late at night, seeing a glowing light through the windows of a church – even an abandoned one. When he walks into the church he discovers that a mass is being celebrated. He joins in, and at some point he discovers that it is none other than a ghostly assembly, presided over by a ghostly priest and attended by the souls of those who inhabit Purgatory. In some versions of the story, the intruder might even recognise the faces of the departed. But he must not interact with them, and he must take care not to take anything from the church, not even holy water, for if he does, he'll never return to the world of the living.

But there are many tricks to trap innocent and unsuspecting souls. The *Compaña* might occasionally have a banquet by the graveyard, perhaps the only rest permitted after so much walking. Any person who passes by will be offered food or drink. As we've learned, accepting anything from them is a fatal error that will lead to eternal doom. Avoiding interaction or pretending to be eating are the best ways to escape a fatal conclusion.[8]

But the more amicable side of the legend of the Holy Company suggests that those who have left the earthly realm and those who remain can, and must, help each other. This is especially obvious in some popular practices that don't exactly tie in with orthodox Catholicism but still persist in some Spanish homes. They involve asking the souls of Purgatory to wake the sleeper at a certain time in the morning, in exchange for a prayer for their salvation. This strange rite involves being woken up by a soft, otherworldly voice calling the name of the petitioner – an uncanny, yet it seems, acceptable substitute for an alarm clock.

Like other Saturnian myths, the *Compaña* serves a social, vital function, ultimately connected with rites of passage. The living and the dead help each other in the transition to the great beyond: the living pray for the dead to find their way, the dead come back to guide the dying. The underlying concept is clear: the journey to the Otherworld is not easy, and we must make sure we are fully prepared for it. FT

NOTES

1 Cape Finisterre, Land's End for the Galicians, was the starting point of the last transit of the souls according to Pagan beliefs. Although Corcubión is 12 kilometres further east, it's also part of the so-called *Costa da Morte*, the Coast of Death, a name probably related to these pre-Christian rites.

2 See Carmelo Lisón Tolosana, *Brujería, estructura social y simbolismo en Galicia* (accessed through GoogleBooks).

3 See Constantino Cabal, *Los dioses de la muerte: La mitología asturiana* (accessed through GoogleBooks).

4 See Claude Lecouteux, *Phantom Armies of the Night: The Wild Hunt and Ghostly Processions of the Undead* (Inner Traditions, 2011).

5 See Aurelio de Llano Roza de Ampudia, *Del Folclore Asturiano* (Talleres de Voluntad, 1922).

6 See Peter Narváez (ed), *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

7 See Katharine Briggs, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies* (Random House, 1997).

8 See Vítor Vaqueiro, *Galicia mágica* (accessed through GoogleBooks).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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HIPPOCRATIC OAFS

OR, DOCTORING THE EVIDENCE

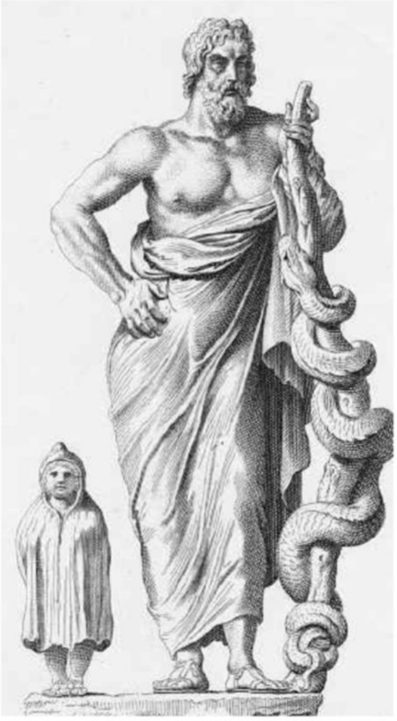
Today, doctors enjoy high status and the respect of society. But it was not always so, says **BARRY BALDWIN**, as he reviews the ambiguous image of the physician from classical civilisation to modernity – a history involving miracle-working, quackery and killing...

“A disease runs its course and then disappears – quite independently of treatment, whether by the poisoned teat of a cow, or the dried sore of a mummy” – Fort, *Books*, p1018.

To bring myself – a quondam university lecturer – equally down to earth, I’ll kick off with this cutting remark made by Athenæus (c. AD 200) for a Greek and Roman audience: “Were it not for the doctors, there’d be nothing stupider than the professors.”[1]

Medicine is the only profession proverbially ridiculed in the New Testament, through the oft-quoted Luke (himself a doctor): “Physician, heal thyself!” (ch4 v23). They don’t fare well in their other NT appearance (Mark ch5 v26), featuring “the woman with the bloody flux” who had “suffered many things of many physicians and spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.” Then along came Jesus and healed her. This supernatural care was surely queue-jumping, two-tier medicine – Christ violating the spirit of the NHS.

ASCLEPIUS WAS APPRENTICED BY HIS MUM TO CHIRON THE CENTAUR



LEFT: Asclepius with his son Telesphorus.
OPPOSITE: A doctor and patient by James Gillray.

BOTH IMAGES: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

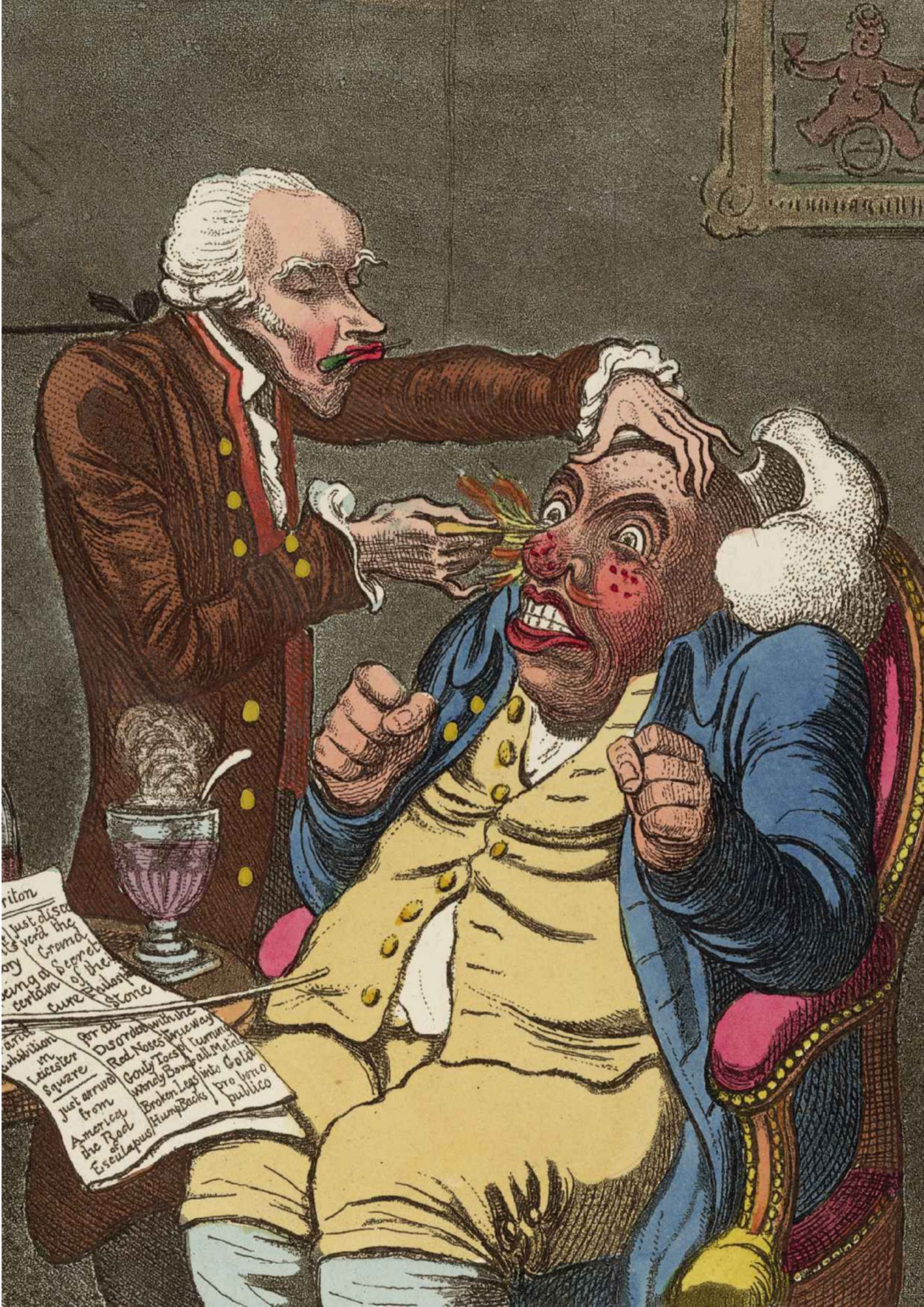
Nothing new in this competition between miracle and medicare. Pagan doctors were overshadowed by the god of healing, Asclepius, son of Apollo, himself both healer and killer – Greece’s Harold Shipman. “Apollo the Healer? He’d want a pretty big fee to cure you!” (Aristophanes, *Birds*).Asclepius was apprenticed by his mum to Chiron the Centaur (literally the horse’s mouth) for medical training. Not content with healing the living, he Lazarus-like raised a dead person with Gorgon’s blood provided by pharmacist Athene, whereupon an angry Zeus blasted him with a thunderbolt – fuliginous equivalent to rebuke by the Minister of Health.

Under Christianity, medics were up against the healing saints Cosmas and Damian, twin patrons of the profession even if they charged no fees. Modern practitioners of shock treatment can trace their science back to this pair. They promised a crippled man he’d be cured by sleeping with his dumb female neighbour. When he crawled into her bed, she screamed for help, he ran for his life. Thus, the Byzantine narrative concludes, he taught mute to speak, she taught cripple to walk. Subsidiary happy ending: they got married.

Another star performer was Saint Artemius. A mother, trailing her hernia-afflicted son around Constantinople looking for a cure, was approached by a doctor asking “How much will you give me to heal him?” – first recorded ambulance chaser. Artemius intervened and did it for nothing. While colleague Saint Simeon looked after women’s diseases, Artemius specialised in male genital tumours – clearly on the ball.

Augustine has a wincing account of hæmorrhoid operations versus miraculous cures in *City of God* (22. 8) which I fancy is not on the reading list of modern medical schools – perhaps better called *Pity of God*.

But you’d not want to meet the Byzantine medical researcher who vivisected a captured chieftain from chest to pubis for anatomical research, then burned him alive – a Yarn more Ripping than Michael Palin’s.[2]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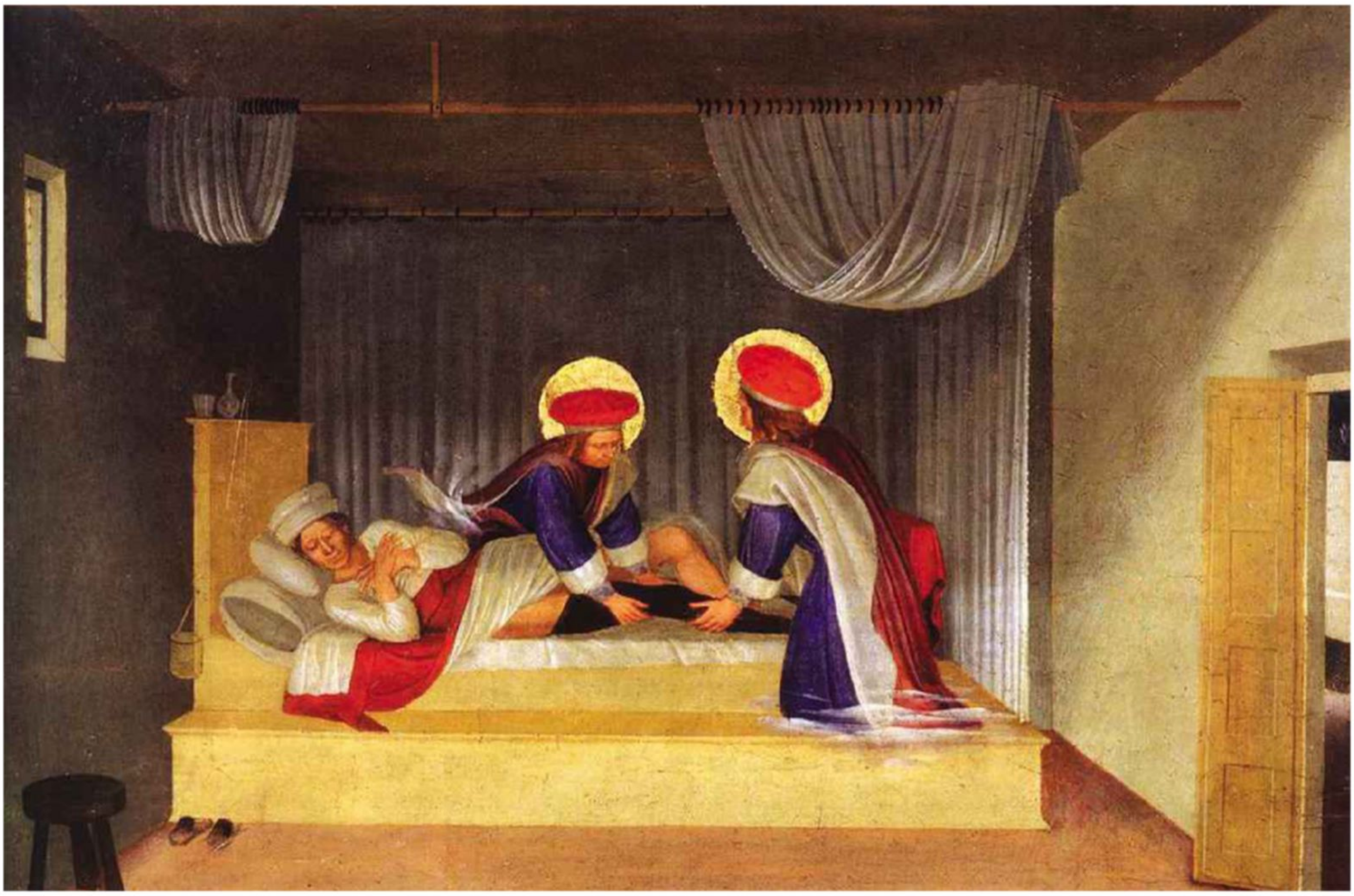

ABOVE: Saints Cosmas and Damian perform the world's first (interracial) leg transplant. **BELOW:** Chaucer's Doctour of Phisik, brandishing his bottle of wee.

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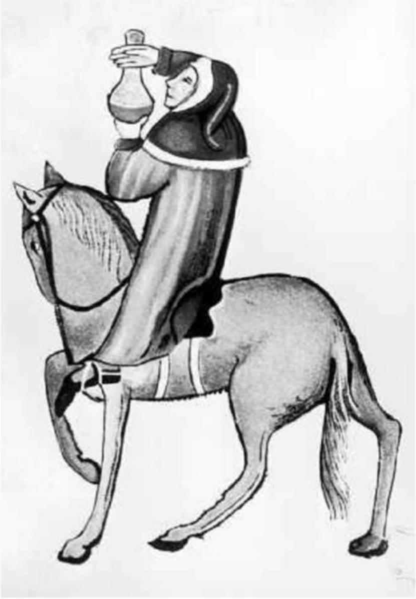
THE MOST DISREPUTABLE PROFESSION

Impotent emperor Romanus III consulted "specialists in sexual disorders" but their ointments and massages had no more effect than the more drastic remedies meted out by a back-street crone (ancient Vera Drake?) – buggery by pepper-sprayed dildo and lashing the genitals with nettles. Inscriptions commemorate a few fully-fledged women doctors, largely confined to wet-nursing and midwifery, the latter's qualifications spelled out by the gynæcologist Soranus, a name needing the same carefully pronunciation as Uranus. Eunapius (4th-century AD) mentions a barmaid who midwived in her spare time – shades of old *Coronation Street* trouper Bet Lynch. And would that we knew more about Agnodike, a transvestite woman obstetrician,[3] or the Michael whose arms were so long he could catch partridges for the indigent scholar John Tzetzes (12th-century). But the general reputation of physicians remained unsavoury. Fulgentius (c. AD 500) dubbed Alexandria's surgeries "miniature abattoirs". The anonymous satire *Mazaris* (15th-century) calls doctors "hell-hounds, vampires, certified killers." Last word goes to the poet Christopher of Mitylene (11th-century), his phraseology conditioned by ancient obsessions with urinal and fæcal-based remedies – Nero's doctors gave him a boar-dung-based drink to keep his singing voice in good repair:

You think you're so fine,
You think you are It.
Your pay is from urine,
Your fame is from shit. [4]



Back to the Bible. Moses (Deuteronomy ch28 v22-8) showed little regard for local doctors in his confident prediction: "The Lord shall smite thee with consumption, fever, inflammation, the botch of Egypt, emerods, scab, and itch, whereof thou canst not be healed."

Hammurabi's Law Code (no. 218) specified that surgeons bungling operations should have their hands amputated. Tempting to revive this, but perhaps the reason why Babylon was short of doctors. Herodotus (1. 197) says their sick were put out on the streets where all passers-by were legally obliged to prescribe remedies from their own experience – Everyone an intern, People's Physic at its apogee!

Pliny (29. 8. 18) who didn't know this, bemoaned the absence of such laws, advocating capital punishment for delinquent docs, such extremism doubtless honed by his John Birch-like belief (inherited from the Elder Cato) that Greek doctors were in a conspiracy to bump off top Romans.

Sexual misdemeanours (castigated in his Oath, taken to Apollo – how many modern doctors believe in this most bisexually libidinous of Olympians?) helped account for Hippocrates's lament in his *Canon* that medicine had become the most disreputable profession, the root cause being absence of any malpractice penalties. This may console modern ones as they gloomily shell out their insurance premiums.

Egypt had no GPs. Every doctor concentrated on one complaint, resulting (Herodotus again) in an over-production of specialists – now where have we heard that before?

The oldest Egyptian medical text (Kahun Papyrus, c. 1850 BC) prescribes contraceptive suppositories compounded from crocodile dung. Whether these worked by altering vaginal pH levels or by their odour's deterrent effect I leave to your imagination.

Still, Egyptian medicine achieved international reputation. When Cyrus the Great needed an oculist, he asked the Pharaoh for his best one – Bashar al-Assad was too busy. Angry at being sent abroad, the eye man contrived war between the two countries. Centuries later, famous physician Oribasius successfully plotted to make Julian Rome's last pagan emperor. Maybe Stalin wasn't so paranoid about doctors' plots, after all.

Homeric doctor Machaon was also a warrior – and rather more than a M*A*S*H unit surgeon. His rescue (*Iliad* 11) was a priority, since "a man who can extract arrows and apply ointments is worth many others." But, despite his fame and Asclepian parentage, he couldn't heal the suppurating foot (pus in boots?) of the crack archer Philoctetes, who was bundled off to the notorious Lemnos, an island ancestor of isolation hospitals.

Machaon himself was healed by old Nestor with Pramnian wine sprinkled with feta cheese and an onion dropped in. Some invalids might prefer death to that – I'd stick to a restorative pint of Guinness.

The pragmatic view of doctors is reinforced elsewhere in Homer (*Odyssey* 17. 382-5) and Plato (*Gorgias* 455b) where they are bracketed with skilled craftsmen. Modern writers are less kind. AHM Jones concluded: "Their principal activity was signing medical certificates for the courts, their fees were exorbitant, their cures few", [5] whilst Marxist Geoffrey de Ste Croix snidely bracketed them with "whores and other providers of essential services." [6]

Hippocrates is said (accounts vary) to have burned down a medical centre in his native Cos before fleeing: what skeleton was in the Father of Medicine's cupboard? Naming no names, he frequently lambasted rivals as quacks – Hippocratic oafs. He was the profession's earliest sexpert, pronouncing that young men contract gout after intercourse, whereas eunuchs are immune from this and baldness. Not sure what he'd have made of the journal *Pediatrics* (July 2000) labelling of ambiguous genitalia as "a social emergency". More encouraging to myself as a septuagenarian in Canada is his claim that older men should have sex more often in winter.

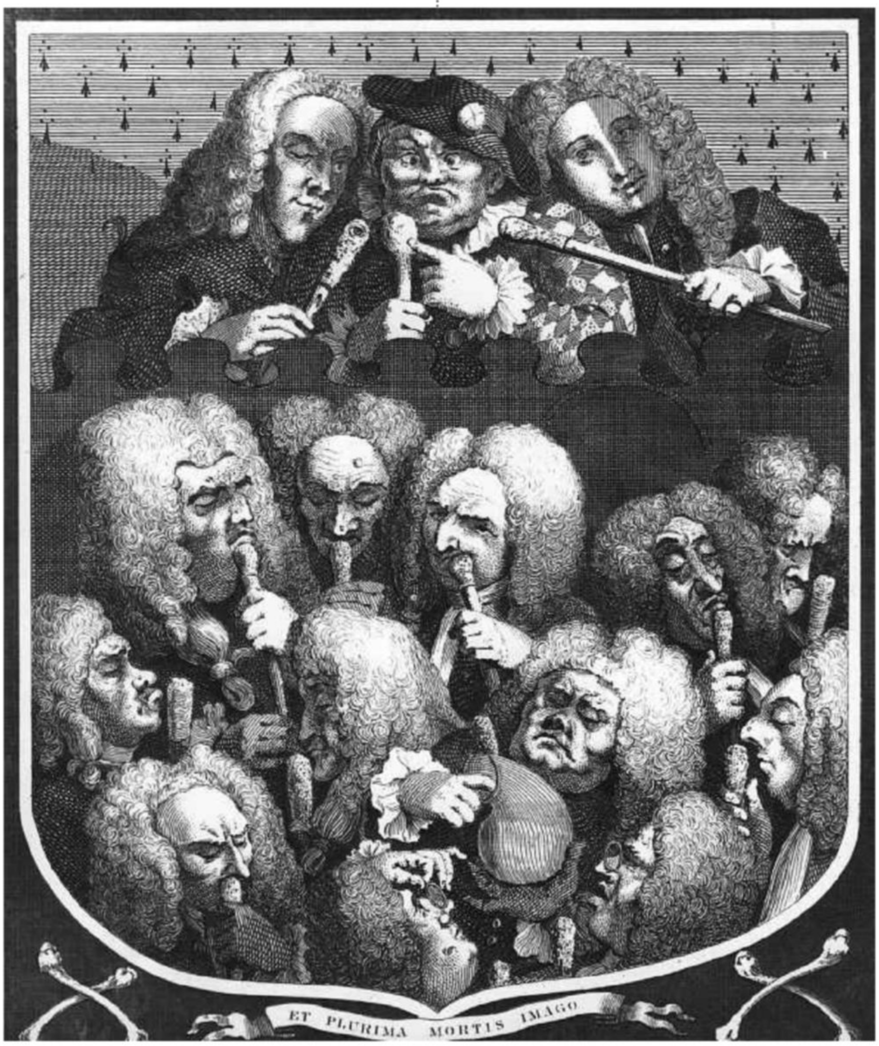
Hippocrates was prophetic in diagnosing Scythian health problems as the result of wearing trousers. The *Sunday Times* (3 Sept 1989) quoted a Caledonian medic's claim that Scottish heart disease had gone up since the kilt gave way to tight trews and underpants.

Recording a surgeon who opened a man's larynx to remove a fishbone, promptly killing him, Plato concluded (*Gorgias* 455-6 and *passim*) that doctors needed a course in oratory to persuade patients to accept such drastic treatment, poetically summing up:

By doing nothing, the doctor will
Do more good than by using his (s)kill [7]

QUACKS AND KILLERS

Rome's first (219 BC) doctor, the Greek Agatharchus, quickly earned the nickname 'Killer' for his savage use of cautery and knife. Byzantine Theodore Prodromos (12th century) describes his dentist who wielded an extractor big enough to whip out an elephant's tushipeg as 'Public Executioner' – the moment of tooth.



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ABOVE: A group of 18th century doctors in 'The Company of Undertakers', William Hogarth's satirical engraving on the medical profession, bearing the motto: "And many an image of death".

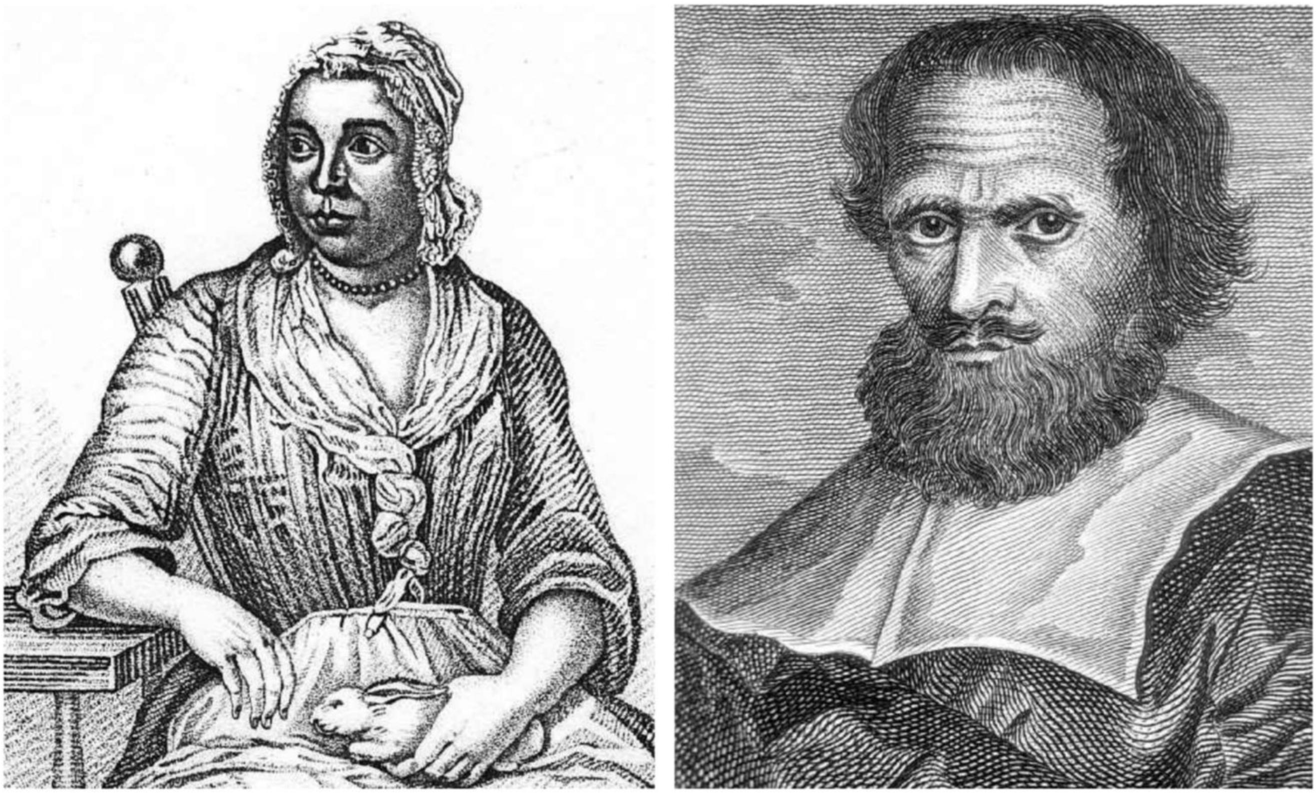
WILLIAM HARVEY TREATED HIS GOUT BY SITTING BARE-LEGGED IN THE SNOW

The Greek proverb 'Many doctors have killed the King' soon caught on in Rome, being on the lips of dying emperor Hadrian (AD 138) and adapted to tombstone epitaphs cursing bungled operations, one reading:

The docs cut off the wrong limb;
Their cure was the end of him

Cicero accused the politico Clodius of using a doctor as hitman to knock off a rival via lethal dose – Westminster, take note. Claudius's personal physician Xenophon allegedly connived at wife Agrippina's poisoning him with that famous dish of mushrooms (**FT206:21**) – mushroom for speculation. Nero hired notorious pharmacist Locusta (**FT139:18**) to bump off awkward relatives. Eventually executed – Locusta's last stand – she's been dubbed the first serial killer (**FT134:51**), though her tally didn't approach that of the Italian Toffana (c. AD 1700), whose lethal drops eliminated 600 victims. [8] As Quentin Crisp said of multiple child-murderer Gilles de Rais: "Numbers are not style, but it's difficult not to be impressed."

Chaucer's 'Doctour of Phisik's' professional emblem is a glass urinal – subtext is obvious: physicians are piss(e). John Owen (1564-1622) penned Latin poems on their incompetence and greed. From the word's origin (1579), quacks earned contemptuous definitions from (for example) Robert Boyle and Daniel Defoe. William Harvey [9] treated his gout by sitting bare-legged in the snow, alternating with "his use of a pretty young wench for warmeth-sake, as King David did." William Butler cured an opium overdose by putting the patient inside a slaughtered cow's belly, and for shock treatment tossed a fever victim from a 20ft balcony into the Thames. Sir Jonas Moore cured his sciatica "by boyling his buttock" – how do you boil a single one, and without affecting contiguous delicate parts? [10]



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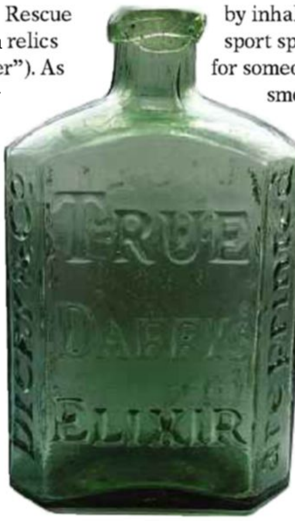
ABOVE LEFT: Mary Tofts, with one of her rabbit offspring. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Simon Forman, quack, poisoner and seducer of female patients. **BELOW:** A Daffy's Elixir bottle.

Hogarth's cartoons frequently target doctors,[11] notably those who connived at the fraudulent claim (1726) of Mary Tofts of Godalming to have given birth to nine rabbits (see **FT57:26, 108:28, 202:40**); the bunnies had been stuffed up her vagina – not somewhere Peter Rabbit ever went. Medics were also excoriated in the feminist magazine *The Female Tatler* (1709-10), including a gender blunder leading to a girl being christened Robert – shades of Johnny Cash's 'A Boy Named Sue'.

Like a modern tabloid, though, *Tatler* profited from what it exposed. While skewering quack oculist William Read, it was happy to publish his advertisements for instant cures in pages crammed with blurbs for nostrums ranging from flatulence ("A Famed Elixir for the Wind which Expels it to Admiration") to venereal disease ("Infallible Rescue from the obvious and hidden relics of that Disgraceful Distemper"). As *Scribner's Magazine* (October 1925) observed: "Time has not obliterated the love of being quacked."



"When a doctor goes wrong, he's the first of criminals. He has nerve and knowledge". Arthur Conan Doyle's remark was prompted by the likes of Edward Pritchard, who poisoned wife and mother-in-law just to see if he could get away with murder. He didn't – 100,000 people watched him hang in Scotland's last public execution (1885), a nooseworthy event.

Drs Bates, Hall, Jenkins, and White respectively stood for ex-cons, drunks, violent prisoners, and drug-addicts,[12] while Dr Thomas Cream was the Lambeth Poisoner, also claiming to be Jack the Ripper. I imagine Æneas Sylvius (later Pope Pius II) had murderous thoughts about the physician whose fever treatment caused him 90 bowel movements in one night – what price Ex-Lax?

Medics were a combative lot. Pepys witnessed "a violent coffee-house quarrel" between some. Things often got heated at the famously inebriate Medical Club at St Albans Tavern.

As an unregenerate pipe-smoker, I'm glad to report Lord Sunderland (1594) curing a football-incurred stomach bruise by inhalation – argument for tobacco sport sponsorship? A traditional cure for someone nearly drowned was to blow smoke up their anus, doubtless a fundamental improvement for rescuer over the kiss of life. (QUESTION: If smoking is harmful, why does it cure kippers?)

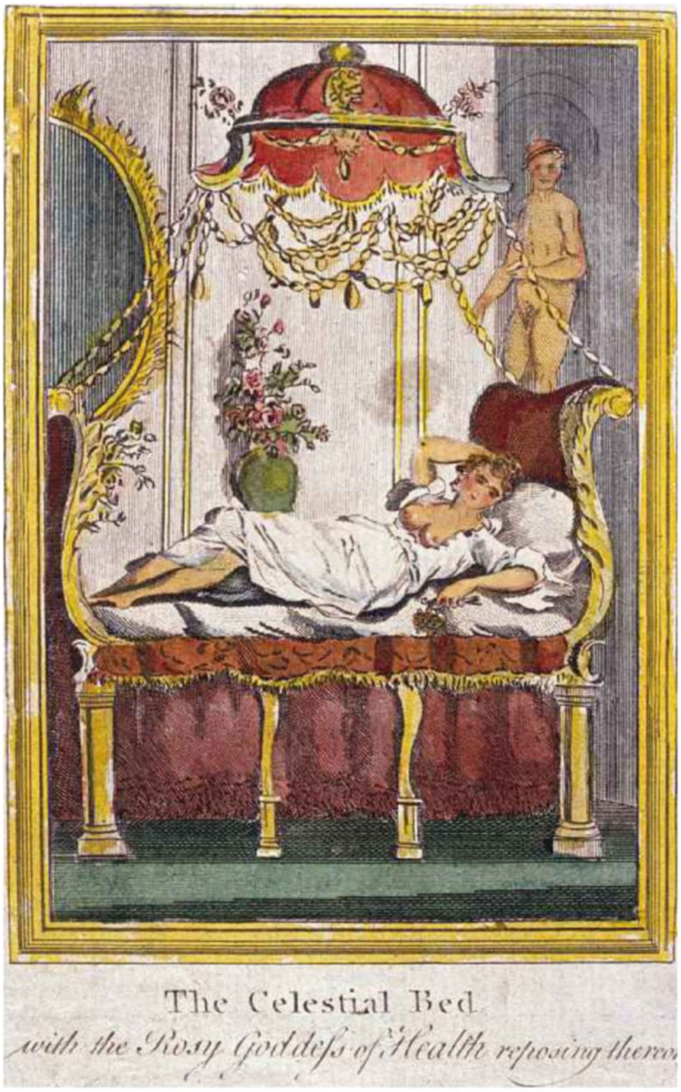
Kill or cure? 36 physicians couldn't relieve Richard Baxter's (1615-1699) giant gallstone (kept until 1830 in the British Museum). Ralph Josselin's (1616-1683) wife advised him against trying Daffy's Elixir. She was right; he promptly expired. Oliver Goldsmith's death (1772) was blamed on the notorious James's Powders, concocted by a medic described by Samuel Johnson as "not sober for 20 years."

Goldsmith had lampooned doctors peddling quack STD remedies. Case history files in London's Hunterian Museum include the Reverend Shepherd who "fell in with a low woman and had connection." Hunter treated him with corrosive enema, a dose of Saccharian Saturni (others preferred Broomfield's Pills or New Canada Balsam), and heating his penis over a bowl of steaming brandy.

SEXUAL HEALING

Simon Forman (1552-1611) was branded 'The Devil' by Ben Jonson, twice skewering in verse his astrological quackery and penchant for seducing female patients, one of whom was Emilia Lanier, controversially identified by AL Rowse as Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady'. He sired several bastards, one conveniently killed by an over-energetic midwife – Captain Cundum hadn't yet invented the sheath that bears his name. Forman didn't need to play away, his wife Joan (who nicknamed him 'Tronco') being praised for her erotic enthusiasm that "engorged my rod". Like Samuel Pepys, Forman's diaries are crammed with multilingual sexual details, claiming in Henry Miller style several women in a day, also inventing a new word 'Halek' for fucking. When not thus engaged, this Smart Halek found time to oversee the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower.[13]

Differently memorable is self-styled (he failed medicine at Edinburgh) Doctor James Graham (1745-1794), famous first


The Celestial Bed
with the Rosy Goddess of Health reposing thereo

LEFT: Doctor James Graham's celebrated 'Celestial Bed'.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

for galvanising London High Society with his 'Electric Medicine', then his 'Temple of Health' where for two guineas you could ogle his skimpily-dressed 'nurses' (one was Nelson's future Lady Hamilton) before shelling out £50 to proceed to his 'Celestial Bed', worked by a combination of electrified headboard and magnetic fluid that 'guaranteed' potency and conception.

When this craze wore off, he fled back to Edinburgh, now promoting mud baths as a nutritious panacea that'd allow you to live without food – sales pitch appealing to canny Scots. Graham died in 1794, after being arrested for public nudity, poor policy in Edinburgh's climate.[14]

A century later came another kind of medical technology, in the shape of Jacques-Arsène d'Arsonval's (1851-1940) high-frequency impulses via electrodes inserted into the patient's rectum to treat manifold disorders. It also gave English the word 'darsonvalisation', which English should give back.

Vendors of aphrodisiacs and nostrums for sexual problems from impotence to venereal diseases were never short of suckers. The *Morning Post* (1776) trumpeted a 'Bath Restorative' as "admirable for those worn out by women and wine. Where persons are not early happy in their conjugal embraces it will render their intercourse prolific. Those who have impaired their constitutions by self-abuse will find themselves a certain remedy" – knocks hell out of Viagra.

Masturbation links the 18th and 19th centuries. From English quack Bekker's *Onania* (1710) through medicals Tissot (1764) and Vogel (1786), phobic volumes warned and prescribed against the supposedly lethal sin of wanking. Victorian JL Milton's best-selling (12 editions by 1887) *Spermatorrhea* ordered spiked cages for nocturnal use, plus apparatus causing kitchen bells to ring if a filial erection arose – never saw this in *Downton Abbey*. Its endorsment by Dr Thomas Bryant (*Practical Surgery*, 1879) nicely coincided with Mark Twain's lecture 'Science and Onanism' given to the Stomach Club of Paris.

Around this time, Isaac Brown was performing clitoridectomies to 'treat' women either 'incontinent' or 'insane' because they wished to dump their husbands under the 1857 Divorce Act.

An alternative to mutilation was offered by Lydia Pinkham (1873) of Massachusetts in the shape of her Vegetable Compound, marketed as "The Greatest Remedy in the World" against "female weaknesses".

Marcel Proust's younger brother Robert, having survived being run over by a five-ton coal wagon, wrote *The Surgery of the Female Genitalia*, while his penchant for prostatectomies was such that they were nickname 'Proustatectomies'. In Proust's Paris, arsenic was a doctor-recommended aid to maintaining erections, less tasty than their mediæval colleagues' instructions to wives to sprinkle their husbands' tackle with salt as a virility boost.

I must end with some Canadian content, so step forward Dr Robert Stubbs (*Maclean's*, 12 June 2000) with his vaginal rejuvenations and penile enlargements, to which I offer this poetic tribute:

Men, if your dongs are not very long,
If your pricks are mere little grubs,
Cheer up, you can look like King Kong
After just one visit to Stubbs.
Girls, if you're from Saudi Arabia,
Stubbs can re-jigger your labia.
If your boy-friends are urgin'
That you prove you're a virgin,
Then for your wedding-bed
Wear a Stubbs maidenhead.

(Moral of this essay – Stick to the NHS!)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BARRY BALDWIN is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and Emeritus Professor of Classics at the University of Calgary. Best known in his academic field for his work on early Greek humorists and satirists, he has been a regular columnist for *Fortean Times* for many years.

NOTES

1 *Learned Men at Dinner,* bk15 para666A. Present company excepted (ahem!), the late Roy Porter's many books and articles are the most readably informative.

2 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, under the year 765.

3 Hyginus, *Fables*, no. 274.

4 More case histories in my 'Beyond the House Call,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984), 15-9 – available online.

5 *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), pp1012-3.

6 *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London, 1981), p271.

7 See further Dr LIllian Osler's 1893 address 'Physic and Physicians As Depicted In Plato' to the John Hopkins Hospital Historical Club (Online).

8 JB Mayor's 1881 edition of Juvenal has this suggestive Index entry: "Medicine – see Poisoning."

9 This and the following anecdotes are from John Aubrey's (1625-c.1697) *Brief Lives* – once dramatised in a one-man West End show by Roy Dotrice.

10 For possible answers, cf. my 'Persius' Boiled Buttocks,' *Acta Classica* 38 (1995), 94-7.

11 Relevant Hogarth cartoons include: *The Company of Undertakers*; *Doctors in Labour, or the New Whim-wham*; *The Harlot's Progress*; *The Stages of Cruelty*.

12 Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of the Underworld* (1949; rev. ed. 1961), and many cognate lexica of slang and vernacular.

13 Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman, Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford, 2005).

14 Lydia Syson, *Doctor of Love: Dr James Graham and his Celestial Bed* (London, 2008).

THE MYSTERIOUS ORIGINS OF OUR MOON

ALAN MURDIE reports on a Royal Society meeting at which lunar experts from all over the world pondered the question of just how Earth's Moon came into being.

Media-friendly physicists and cosmologists like Professor Brian Cox and Professor Lawrence Krauss often seem supremely confident when convincing their audiences of how our Universe burst into existence from the 'Big Bang' an incredible 13.7 billion years ago. However, such breezy self-assurance perhaps seems a little questionable given that scientists still aren't sure as to how our Moon was formed much closer to home, a mere 4.5 billion years ago. Indeed, such are the puzzles and uncertainties that the world's oldest scientific body, the Royal Society, took the opportunity in September 2013 to bring together many leading lunar experts for an international discussion meeting devoted to the 'Origin of the Moon'. Convened over 23-27 September, the first two days were held at the Royal Society's headquarters in London, with a further intense two-day session at Chicheley Hall in Buckinghamshire.[1]

There have been many myths and legends about how our Moon came into being. From a scientific perspective, the usual starting point is the now abandoned theory of Sir George Darwin (1845-1912), who proposed the Moon formed from material thrown out by a rapidly spinning Earth. Some 20th century supporters of this theory even proposed that the hollow of the Pacific was left behind as a scar of the event.[2] Other theories suggested the Moon was a wandering planet captured by the Earth. At the time of the Royal Society's previously lunar conference in 1975, the most promising theory was that of John O'Keefe and Harold C Urey, who proposed that the Moon formed together with the Earth by accretions from the original Solar System nebula, starting around 4.7 billion years ago, or alternatively from a cloud of material around the Sun.[3]

SCIENTISTS STILL AREN'T SURE AS TO HOW OUR MOON WAS FORMED

BOTH PHOTOS: NASA

Following a similar conference of lunar experts in Kona, Hawaii, in 1984, the current consensus among scientists is that the Moon arose from a collision between the Earth and another Mars-sized body dubbed 'Theia' (after the mother of the Greek Moon goddess Selene). This collision occurred soon after the formation of the Earth itself, with the Moon being formed from the fragments. Collision simulations by Dr Robin Canup of the Southwest Research Center, USA, show that Theia must have hit the Earth when it was about 95 per cent formed.[4] Over a relatively short period, the molten fragments cooled down, forming the Moon. This collision or giant impact model is now accepted by most astronomers and lunar scientists as the 'canonical theory' of the Moon's origin.

So far, so good. But although simple to state, the collision scenario is posing many problems, at least as a way of explaining the Moon we have today. Exploring possible resolutions for the problems generated by the giant impact model was one of the main aims for the Royal Society's meeting, attracting scientists spanning a range of disciplines including physics, geology, chemistry, astronomy and experts in meteorites and space exploration. In an article of this length it is not possible to do justice even to the abstracts of the papers under discussion, let alone the complexities of the physics, chemistry and celestial mechanics and their possible interpretations, which in many aspects can only be appreciated by specialists within the fields concerned. But as was admitted at the start of the meeting by Professor David Stevenson of Caltech, USA, despite the existence of the major problems and puzzles raised by the giant impact model, scientists feel loath to abandon it "because all the alternatives are worse".

Indeed, he struck a very fortean note, saying he was compelled at the outset to remind the gathering of the Royal Society's Latin motto *Nullius in verba* ("Don't believe what they tell you") – and telling the gathering "Keep that in mind!" His open-minded approach was reflected by a number of other speakers at the conference referring to their own and other collision scenarios as essentially 'stories' containing many significant gaps and contradictions.

A major problem for the collision scenario arises from analysis of Moon rocks themselves. From what we know of the Moon from geological samples brought back from the Apollo missions (*en passant*, yes, the Moon landings happened!) both lunar rocks and meteorite samples show marked similarities with terrestrial rocks. This has been accepted since the early 1970s, when I remember as a boy the happy announcement of this discovery in *Hermes*, the Journal of the Junior Astronomical Society, with an article entitled "Collect your own Moon Rock" explaining how you could find rocks of great age and similar composition to those from the Moon within the British Isles. Isotopic analysis of Earth and Moon rocks shows striking similarities for chemical isotopes for oxygen, silicon and other elements, each element sharing the same number of neutrons in their atomic structure. Isotopes are inherited by the planets and bodies from accretion at the beginnings of the Solar System of material and are not altered by subsequent geological processes. From what we know of the other planets and from meteorites reaching our world, bodies that formed elsewhere all have their own distinctive isotopic signatures, different from Earth's and linked to their place of formation. In contrast, rocks from the Moon and the Earth show a very close match, with Professor Alex Halliday of the University of Oxford telling the conference that "the atoms of the Earth are basically those found on the Moon".

However, this causes problems for the giant impact scenario, based upon simulations of a Moon-forming collision. Models suggest that most of the lunar material would be derived from the impacting body Theia rather than from the Earth. The dynamics of the problem were illustrated by Dr Robin Canup and other speakers, with the Canup simulations showing that the splash material that formed the Moon comes mostly from Theia mantle material which was poor in iron.

SIMULATED
LUNAR SAMPLES

ABOVE: A NASA display (strangely, *en plein air*) of 'simulated lunar samples' from 1974.

However, when examining the materials which make up the Moon, based upon sample evidence, there is not enough of a postulated Theia, and too much of the Earth to fit expectations of what happens in a collision between two planet-sized bodies. In particular, why are the oxygen isotope abundances in the Earth and Moon identical, so as to make them twins?

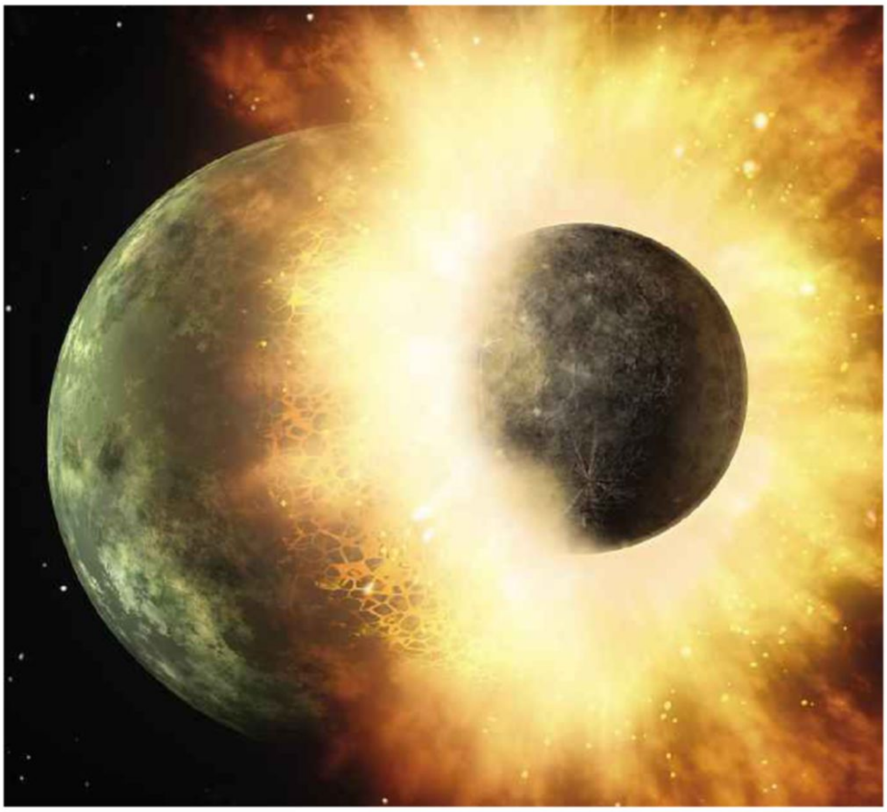
Such isotopic similarity makes it look as though both Earth and Theia originated from exactly the same position in the Solar System, 1 Astronomical Unit (1 AU) from the Sun. Mars, which is further away, has quite different oxygen isotope abundance ratios. As the Earth is considered to have grown by the accretion of smaller bodies of material (termed planetesimals), the early Earth is thought to have gathered up material near 1 AU first by gravitational attraction. The last thing to be drawn in, like a fully-formed Theia, would seem likely to have come from halfway between the Earth and Mars or halfway between Earth and Venus. But if this scenario is correct, Theia would be expected to have quite a different oxygen isotope abundance ratio.

The dynamics of what happens when worlds collide pose further problems. The physics of a postulated collision for forming the Moon requires Theia to have fallen in at very low velocity, not consistent from a very eccentric orbit of wandering planet or asteroid. Given that the Earth is presumed to have formed 95 per cent at the time of collision – after all, you need both bodies to exist before you can have a collision – where could a body the size of Theia have formed at 1 AU from the Sun where it would not be swept up by the orbiting Earth before it had had time to grow?

Of course, if the isotopic signatures of Theia (wherever it originated) and Earth were both the same before collision there is less of a problem. But it seems highly unlikely two bodies with the same isotopic signatures would (a) form in different regions of the Solar System and (b) end up colliding.

On this point Dr Hugh O'Neill of the Australian National University, a veteran of the Kona conference, was even prepared to suggest that Theia might have emerged somewhere far from us, amid the outer planets. When challenged that this seemed implausible he cheerily responded: "Well, life is also highly improbable!"

Furthermore, post-collision, just where did the remains of Theia end up? If the collision model is correct, much debris from the shattered Theia spread out in a disc to form the Moon, but where did all the pieces go? One place where Theia's remnants are apparently not to be found is inside the Earth's crust or mantle (which should have absorbed some Theia material from the impact). This has even led to an extraordinary suggestion mentioned in an


NASA

ABOVE: An artist's impression of the collision of Theia with Earth. **BELOW:** Cosmologist Hanns Hörbiger.

abstract by Professor H Jay Melosh of Purdue University, USA, that Theia might have been a body composed of ice, and who describes the collision model facing an 'isotopic crisis'. [5]

Another postulated scenario is that a silicate Earth and Theia were compositionally distinct with respect to isotopes, but that terrestrial magma and lunar-forming material somehow underwent turbulent mixing and equilibration in the aftermath of the giant impact. This mixing might arise in a molten disc period between the collision and the lunar accretion, lasting perhaps 10 million years – but no one is certain.

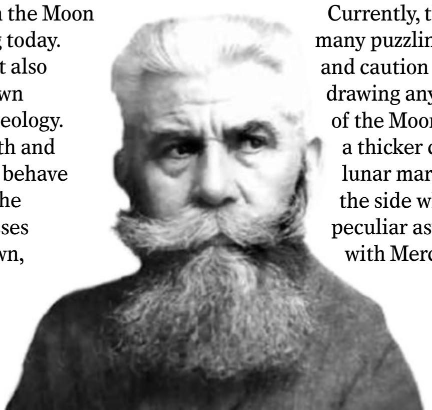
Yet another possibility is that there was more than one collision between the Earth and other Theia-like bodies. But including more collisions makes the orbital dynamics of the fragments increasingly difficult to reconcile and more improbable with each one added… At this point I began to wonder if somewhere the bones of Hanns Hörbiger (1860-1931), who posthumously became the favoured cosmologist of the Third Reich with his bizarre concept of a 'universal ice theory' involving multiple moons crashing down upon the Earth over many epochs, might be twitching in misplaced sympathy. [6]

Aside from dynamical problems, there is huge uncertainty as to how a collision (or collisions) result in the Moon and the Earth existing today. A collision model must also be able to fit with known terrestrial and lunar geology. Just how both the Earth and the proto-Moon might behave after a collision, how the envisaged molten masses of both would cool down, the fate of the debris in geological terms, including the most volatile elements, and how elements would ultimately reach their current proportions, distributions and states are all questions on which there are no settled answers, accompanied as they are by major uncertainties regarding the time-scales at all relevant stages. Traces of water detected on the Moon provide yet another anomaly. Did it pre-date the giant impact, or could it have arrived later, brought in by way of cometary impacts?

Indeed, in attempting to analyse the problems posed by a giant impact scenario and the seemingly contradictory data, Dr Lindy Elkins-Tanton of the Carnegie Institute suggested that perhaps "there is something about the physical processes of impacts we are failing to apprehend".

One point of agreement for all delegates is that our data concerning the Moon and the rest of the Solar System are limited. Not only is our knowledge of what happened in the early geological history of the Earth far from certain, but the existing data of the composition of the Moon today are slight, our information on the lunar crust being based upon samples from a handful of locations on the near side, which may not be representative.

Currently, the Moon possesses many puzzling geological features and caution needs to be exercised in drawing any conclusions. The far side of the Moon differs radically with a thicker crust and an absence of lunar maria or 'seas' compared with the side which faces the Earth. This peculiar asymmetry is also shared with Mercury. [7] Unfortunately, following the Apollo missions, the Moon has been virtually ignored as a goal for space exploration, with the last probe soft-landing in 1976, although satellite orbiters have mapped the surface since. The Chinese space probe Chang'e 3 carrying a surface lunar rover was launched in November 2013, but no sample of Moon rock is expected to be returned to Earth until 2016.



A number of the speakers gave their opinions on what we need to know, with hopes for new insights emerging from learning more about the composition of other planets, particularly Venus. Scientists must be on their guard against drawing erroneous conclusions from meteoritic fragments surviving extreme heat on their flight through the Earth's atmosphere. [8]

As everyone readily admitted, what we don't know far exceeds everything we do. Indeed, Harold Urey's comment in 1972 that "the Moon is an odd object" remains very true, and that the joke amongst scientists that our theories of lunar origins are so unsatisfactory that the best explanation for the Moon must be observational error still has much resonance! FT

NOTES

1 'Origins of the Moon' Royal Society Discussion Meeting *Abstracts* 23-27 September. Full details will be published in an edition of the Society's *Proceedings.*

2 George Darwin astronomer son of Charles Darwin is variously credited with his insights in 1878, 1879, the 1880s, 1892 and 1896.

3 *The Sky At Night* BBC broadcast 27 July 1975; Patrick Moore, *Sky at Night 6* (1977) BBC publications.

4 Robin M Canup & Erik Asphaug: 'Origin of the Moon in a giant impact near the end of the Earth's formation' in *Nature* 412, 708-712 (16 August 2001); *Abstracts*, Royal Society note 1 ibid.

5 'New approaches to the Moon's isotopic crisis' paper presented to the Royal Society meeting by H. Jay Melosh 24 September 2013 Note 1, ibid.

6 For accounts of Hörbiger's theories see H Bellamy, *Moons, Myths and Man* (1949); Patrick Moore, *Can You Speak Venusian?* (1976)

7 'How does the on-going exploration of Mercury inform our understanding of the Moon?' paper presented to the Royal Society meeting 24 Sept 2013 by Prof Sean Solomon Lamont-Doherty, Earth Observatory, USA, Note 1, ibid.

8 Dr Hugh O'Neill jokily warned that the relative abundance of Martian meteorites recovered for study from Morocco might suggest Morocco is under bombardment from Mars! In fact, relatively lax national export laws compared with other countries are the explanation.

9 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmsJpJLRGc4, and a joke variously attributed to Harold Urey in *The Book of the Moon* (2009) by Rick Stroud and to Irwin I Shapiro, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics (numerous Internet attributions).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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GOING CARACAS

SD TUCKER examines widespread claims of supernatural interference in Venezuela's recent elections, and wonders if the unquiet ghost of Latin-American Marxism will ever truly be slain.

Communist and other left-wing leaders have long had a kind of extended life after death, with North Korea still technically having as its Head of State Kim Il Sung, a man who, lest we forget, died as long ago as 1994 but never let a little thing like that get in the way of his career. The latest socialist spook to have crawled from out of the deserved darkness of his coffin, however, is in Venezuela, where the ghost of the country's former hard-left President Hugo Chávez has supposedly been busily canvassing the electorate on behalf of his former party, the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela), and his chosen successor as leader, Nicolás Maduro.

Chávez died in March 2013, from complications following cancer – which, conspiracy theorist to the end, he insisted had been given to him by his sworn foes the Americans – and Maduro assumed power as interim President in his place immediately afterwards. During his time in power, the former high-ranking soldier and coup-leader Chávez (or 'El Commandante' to his fans) built up a kind of personality cult, portraying himself as a hero of the people and battle-hardened warrior against the imperialist Yankees and their fellow capitalist running-dogs. His political legacy has proven highly divisive, though; whilst many Venezuelans view Chávez as having been a genuine Robin Hood figure devoted to improving the lives of the poor, his equally numerous opponents point out that, by running what should really be an oil-rich nation along Marxist lines, he has only succeeded in making his country poorer overall.

LOS PUEBLOS INDIGENAS
Unidos Oramos
Salud
Pa'lante
Comandante
Independencia y Patria Socialista

BOTH PHOTOS: AFP / GETTY IMAGES

There is no doubt, though, that a substantial number of Venezuelans really did – and still do worship Chávez as a kind of god. His bizarre weekly television show *Aló Presidente* (*Hello, Mr President!*), in which the avuncular demagogue would sit in a studio and cheerily rant for hours at a time, often surprising his own ministers by announcing silly new schemes like the confiscation of the nation's golf-courses, was surprisingly popular viewing, and the scenes of widespread mourning at his funeral made him look like some kind of modern-day saint. In fact, in life Chávez had explicitly encouraged this very same assumption by making use of the slogan "Christ is with the Revolution!" and claiming that Jesus was, like him, a socialist. [1]

A FAN IN IRAN

Seemingly, Chávez even managed to persuade certain foreign leaders that he was some kind of Holy Man – although only, it seems, his fellow odd ones. Whilst in power, he made repeated attempts to ally himself with the leaders of Iran, largely on the basis of their shared hatred of Americans, love of conspiracy theories and status as international pariahs. He was particularly close to the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was most upset to hear about his good friend's demise, penning a public love-letter to the Venezuelan people in which he expressed his unexpected opinion that Chávez was immortal and would one day rise from the dead together with Jesus Christ, to destroy the enemies of Islam.

Declaring a national day of mourning, Ahmadinejad wrote in his letter that, in his view, Chávez was not dead at all, merely pining for the fjords: "Chávez is alive, as long as justice, love and freedom are living. He is alive, as long as piety, brightness and humanity are living," he gushed uncontrollably. "He is alive, as long as nations are alive and struggle for... independence, justice and kindness. I have no doubt that he will come back, along with Christ the Saviour, the heir to all saintly and perfect men, and will bring peace, justice and perfection for all."

To secular Westerners, this may just seem like a particularly emetic attempt at earning *Private Eye* magazine's coveted 'Order of the Brown-Nose' award, but to many Muslims Ahmadinejad's immoderate encomium would have had specific and surprising theological implications. According to popular Islamic belief, a figure named the Mahdi will one day come forth from the shadows, together with revered religious figures from the past like Jesus, to save humanity from the Anti-Christ. The Mahdi is widely believed in by Muslims, and several persons in the past have actually claimed to be him, gathering numerous often quite violent followers

esident
MARTIN FIERRO

LEFT: A female shaman performs a ritual asking for the return to good health of President Chavez in Caracas in April 2012. **ABOVE:** The many moods of Hugo Chavez, as seen in his bizarre weekly television programme *Aló Presidente.*

to their cause (see **FT304:10-11**). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Iran's ayatollahs soon slapped Ahmadinejad down, one religious leader, Ahmad Khatami, making a public statement to the effect that the country's soon-to-be ex-President had "gone too far" with his claims.[2]

Despite Chávez saying that it was "as clear as the full moon" that Nicolás Maduro should be his successor,[3] the moustachioed former bus driver turned politician does not quite have Chávez's level of personal charisma, and many Venezuelans objected to him simply assuming temporary power after his mentor's death. With inflation levels running at absurd annual figures of over 50 per cent and basic staples like toilet rolls running low in the shops due to the socialists' malfunctioning command-economy, Maduro didn't have the convenient mask of his predecessor's almost messianic persona to hide his inept ideologies behind. No foreign leaders were lining up to say that *he* resembled Christ; if anything, he was more like something from *The Life of Brian*. With blame for Venezuela's woes being heaped upon the PSUV party, there seemed real danger that Maduro would lose April 2013's forthcoming elections to his more moderate capitalist opponent, Henrique Capriles. And so, trying to tap into the cult of Chávez' in order to make up for his own shortcomings, Maduro did something astonishing. He claimed to be in touch with the spirit of his dead predecessor.

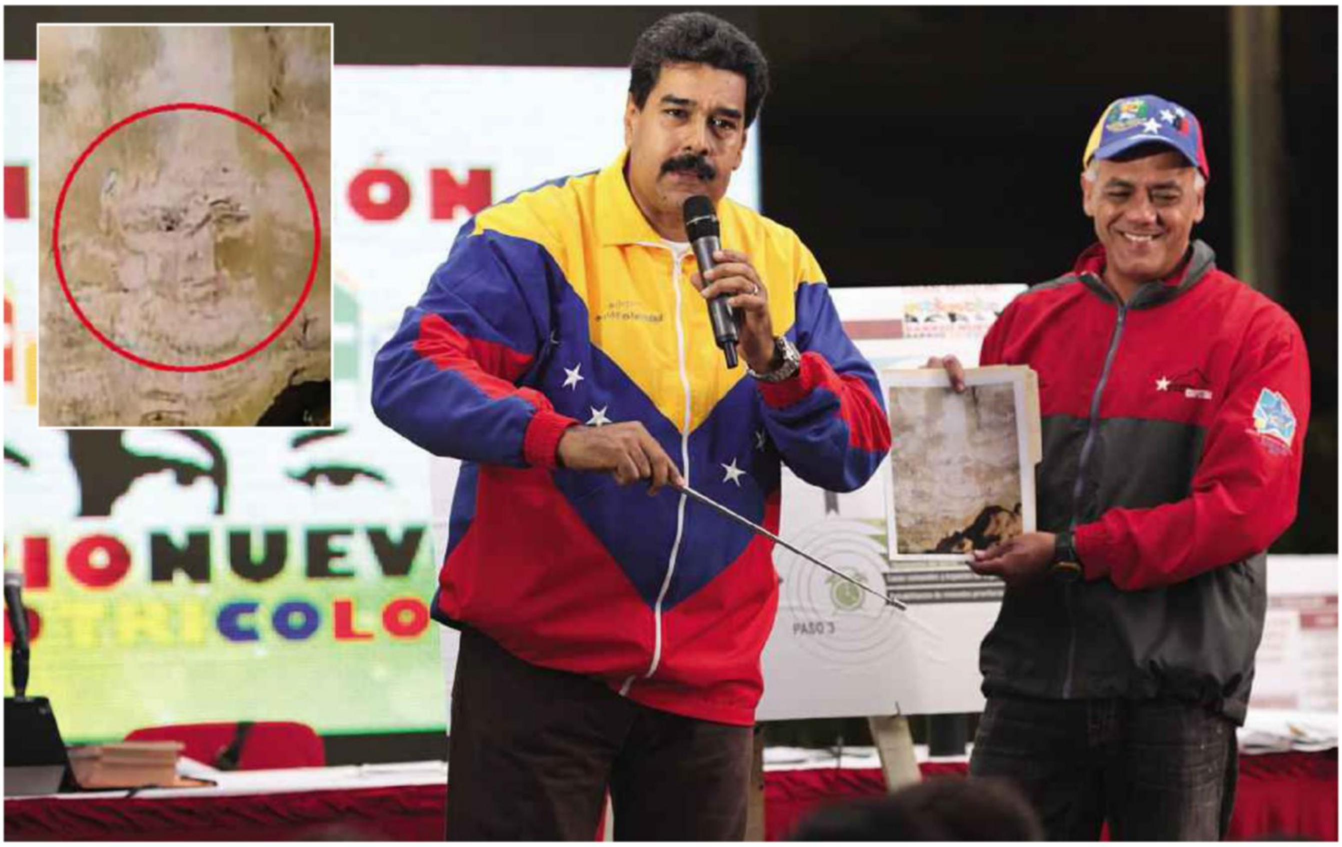
> THIS WAS NO BIRD, BUT THE SPIRIT OF THE PRESIDENT TWEETING HIS SUPPORT

A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME

According to Maduro, when he was praying in a chapel one day during the April election campaign, he saw a small bird enter the room, turn around three times and land upon a wooden beam, where it began whistling. Maduro, inexplicably entranced, stared at the bird and whistled back at it. Supposedly, the bird "looked strangely" at the politician, as it was surely entitled to do so, flew around and then left. According to Maduro, however, this was no bird at all, but the spirit of the dear-departed El Presidente, tweeting his support for the PSUV the old-fashioned way.[4]

In truth, there is no way of knowing how much influence this story had upon the subsequent election results. Probably most people who voted for Maduro had things other than left-wing ghost-birds in their minds when they cast their ballots, and for those who didn't like him anyway, the yarn will probably just have put them off him even more. The PSUV did, however, win the election, albeit by the narrowest of margins, gaining only 1.5 per cent more of the vote than the opposition.

And there things might have rested – except for the fact that, as elections will, another one soon came around. On 8 December 2013, municipal elections were due, and Henrique Capriles' MUD (Democratic Unity Roundtable) alliance were pushing hard to hoover up the protest vote as the Venezuelan economy went from bad to worse, transforming dull local elections into an unofficial referendum upon the PSUV's competence. Things did not look



LEFT: President Nicolás Maduro points to the simulacrum of the departed Hugo Chávez (inset) that appeared in rocks during the digging of an underground railway tunnel.

good for the socialists. This was an election in the month leading up to Christmas and reports in the press were implying that, due to foreign currency restrictions, there would be a shortage of toy imports to keep the nation's kids quiet that festive season. Not wanting to be known as the Commie who stole Christmas, Maduro sprang into action. As well as announcing the formation of the incredibly Orwellian-sounding Deputy Ministry for Supreme Happiness, he also attempted to bribe public-sector workers by bringing forward part-payment of their Christmas bonuses to mid-November. But, with no toys to fill the shelves that coming December, what would the huddled Venezuelan masses have to spend their now virtually worthless currency on? With the nation's Catholic priests complaining that they were unable to buy any fresh communion wine due to the devalued currency, people couldn't even turn to the Church for solace. [5]

One brief distraction tried by Maduro was to claim that innocent sellers of televisions, radios and other electrical goods were a secret capitalist 'enemy within', who, like typical Yankee counter-revolutionaries, were exploiting the poor by marking up the prices in their shops. As such, almost unbelievably, he ordered the Venezuelan army to invade the 'Daka' chain of electronics stores and then hand out flat-screen TVs and other such goodies to the public at a massive discount, to gain votes. However, the boost in popularity Maduro derived from this act was short-lived; due to chronic mismanagement of the country's power infrastructure there were numerous blackouts nationwide, rendering even the most top-of-the-range gadgets temporarily useless. [6] After these embarrassing public displays of 'no power to the people' (which Maduro tediously blamed upon fascist saboteurs) there had to be another way to get the workers back onside. As it turned out, there was...

Significantly, on the very same day that Maduro set up his Deputy Ministry for Supreme Happiness, he had also announced the creation of a new Loyalty and Love to Hugo Chávez Day, giving clear indication of where his alternative strategy for grabbing votes lay. In retrospect, the signs were clear. As far back as August, Maduro had told the Venezuelan people that he had transformed the army barracks in which Chávez had plotted a failed coup back in 1992 into a museum-cum-shrine to the Dear Leader, and had begun sleeping in it at night in order to be close to his dead friend. Worse, he even forced other party officials to follow him down there and engage in some very unusual sleepovers with him. "I sometimes come at night. At times, many times, I sleep here," he said. "We enter at night and we stay to sleep. At night we reflect on things here." [7] Maybe that's where Maduro and his cronies cooked up their next mad scheme.

SOCIALIST SIMULACRA CORNER

In a report in the *Times* on 7 December 2013, a Venezuelan political psychologist opined despairingly that: "A foreigner arriving in Venezuela not knowing that Chávez [had] died would think he is still alive, that he is president." Nicolás Maduro would no doubt agree. Chávez is everywhere, we are all Chávez, the increasingly desperate politician said at a press conference held in late October 2013 in order to inform the world about a miracle which had supposedly just been performed in El Commandante's name. "A look, it is a look of the homeland that is on all sides, including on phenomenons [sic] that do not have an explanation," babbled Maduro incomprehensibly, as he stood on stage wearing a distinctly un-presidential and ill-fitting tracksuit emblazoned in the colours of the Venezuelan flag, and pointing excitedly at a blown-up photograph with a little stick. But what on Earth did the photo show?

FT readers will be familiar with the phenomenon. Examples of it appear every month in this very magazine, in the 'Simulacra Corner' section. It was, in short, a spontaneously occurring and very much non-paranormal image of a face, in this case one that had appeared in rocks beneath the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, whilst workers were digging out tunnels for an underground railway. If Mr Maduro had sent in his photo to this magazine, however, then I doubt he would have received an *FT* mug or T-shirt for his efforts, as many have done before him. Supposedly, the face was none other than that of Hugo Chávez himself; but, really, if this was the great man's best effort at appearing from beyond the veil, then he wouldn't be getting my vote any time soon. It is easy enough to see a visage of sorts in the rock-face, but with the distinctive curl of its 'lips' it looks more like Elvis Presley than the Blessed Saint Chávez to me.

Nonetheless, Maduro presented this mundane event to his countrymen as being a full-blown secular miracle. According to him, Chávez's face had appeared underground at 2am one morning and been snapped by a worker with his cameraphone, before it

COMMUNISM, CANCER AND CASTRO

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Wielding Simon Bolivar's pistols. **ABOVE:** Striking a Castro pose.

How much truth is there in the idea that the Americans caused Chávez's death? Not a lot, probably. Chávez himself was one of the first to start spreading rumours after his diagnosis had been made, although even he had to concede that he had no actual proof of it. Nonetheless, he did make speeches asking questions like: "Would it be so strange that they [the US] have invented the technology to spread cancer and we won't know about it for 50 years?" Chávez was at pains to state that he was not definitely accusing the CIA of doing so, merely "taking advantage of my freedom to reflect and air my opinions faced with some very strange and hard-to-explain goings-on." But what were these strange goings-on?

Chávez was speaking in the aftermath not only of his own diagnosis with cancer, but also that of his fellow South American leftist, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who announced that she had thyroid cancer in late 2011. She was not the only one. In recent years, a number of left-wing Latin American leaders have had cancer scares, including Dilma Rousseff and Luiz Inácio Lulu da Silva of Brazil, and Paraguay's Fernando Lugo. It is very hard to explain, even with the law of probabilities, what has been happening to some leaders in South America, Chávez said. It's at the very least strange, very strange.

Naturally, US spokesmen wasted little time in labelling the idea "absurd", and people who would like to simply write Chávez off as being an inveterate conspiracy theorist could easily do so. For one thing, Chávez had something of an obsession with what he saw as having been the untimely demise of his all-time hero, Simon Bolivar, the Venezuelan soldier-statesman who led widespread revolt against Spanish colonial rule during the 1820s. Most people agree that Bolivar died from tuberculosis in 1830. Not according to Chávez, though. In his view, Bolivar had been murdered, and so ordered that his body be exhumed to test this theory. When it was dug up, however, tests found no evidence to confirm Chávez's ideas, although he went on believing them nonetheless.

Furthermore, Chávez mixed in some very strange company, conspiracy-wise. One of his closest political friends, for instance, was Evo Morales, the President of Bolivia, whom Chávez warned publicly to "take care of yourself", in case the US should try to give him cancer too. "The Empire [the US] has all the instruments to plan actions to overthrow governments, leaders [and] social movements that are against capitalism," Morales then said in a speech given after Chávez's death. Morales had his own conspiracy theories which he liked to air in public too, though, in July 2011 informing the world that he was scared to fly to America to attend UN summits, as he was paranoid that CIA agents would plant drugs on his Presidential aircraft in an attempt to discredit him as being the head of a narco-state. "I think they have to be preparing *something*," he told his nation's press, presumably whilst looking over his shoulder, just in case.

Chávez's other great friend in the region, meanwhile, was Cuba's former leader Fidel Castro, himself not in the best of health these days. Castro, of course, really was the subject of US assassination attempts, and as a result took to warning Chávez to be on a constant lookout for the hand of the enemy. "According to El Commandante, Fidel always told me, Chávez, take care. These people have developed technology. You are very careless. Take care what you eat, what they give you to eat ... [All it takes is] a little needle and they inject you with I don't know what". Maybe, by mixing with such people, Chávez was simply operating in an environment in which belief in US-led conspiracies was very much the norm, something which would naturally lead him to lend more plausibility to even the most far-fetched tales of a CIA plot.

But *was* it far-fetched? After all, it is indisputable that secret services have occasionally assassinated foreign nationals for one reason or another. Giving someone cancer, though, would appear to be a difficult – and, indeed, ineffective – way to go about this. Apart from Chávez, each of the other Latin American leftists has survived their health scares, and cancer takes time to fully spread. Even Chávez himself, it is worth repeating, was not *certain* that the Americans were responsible for his illness. Come his death, however, the official tone had hardened; according to Nicolás Maduro, El Commandante had most definitely been "attacked" by Venezuela's "historical enemies", the US government. "We have the intuition that our commander Chávez was poisoned by dark forces," Maduro told his mourning countrymen prior to April 2013's elections, whilst also announcing an official inquiry into his hero's 'murder' and dismissing a number of US diplomats from Caracas in protest. With an attitude like that, he'd better start watching his health...

SOURCES

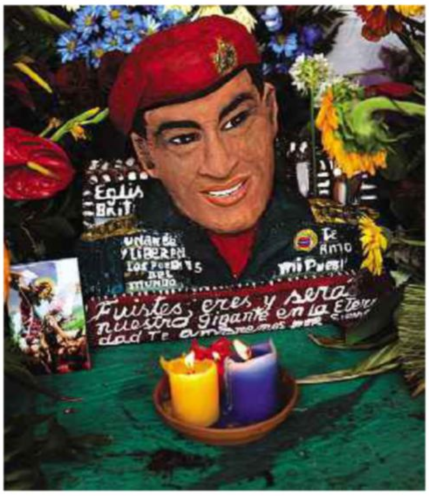
http://theweek.com/article/index/241250/3-conspiracy-theories-about-hugo-chavezs-death; www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/29/hugo-chavez-us-cancer-plot; www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/07/maduro-alleges-chavez-cancer-plot

then suddenly and mysteriously vanished into thin air. “So, just as it appeared, it disappeared…” said Maduro, before going on to imply (I *think* metaphorically) that the face had been able to talk to the construction workers somehow.[8] Did Maduro’s ploy really influence the electorate, however? The outcome of the December elections (held, suspiciously, on the new annual Loyalty and Love to Hugo Chávez Day) perhaps suggested that they did not. The vote was split, with reports the day after polling closed saying that about 49 per cent went to the PSUV and about 43 per cent to the MUD.[9] Venezuela remained very much a country divided.

VOODOO ECONOMICS

Any remaining British Wolfie Smiths reading this article from deep within their hidden Maoist cells while patiently awaiting the imminent and historically inevitable collapse of the Western capitalist model may, however, perhaps be a little confused at this point. In Little Red Books and Communist Manifestos across the world, there is precious little mention of the supernatural or the sacred. Religion, indeed, was famously dismissed by Marx as being nothing more than “the opium of the people”. If so, then what had the Venezuelan Left been smoking, exactly?

One possible answer to this question is that people have often underestimated Communism’s ability to engage in a process known as ‘syncretism’ – that is to say, to adapt to the prevailing beliefs and customs of different cultures around the world and then reclaim them as being in some sense its own. An unexpected example of this process in action appeared in the news recently when, in September 2013, a Brazilian woman named Raquel Rolnik, the UN ‘Special Rapporteur on Housing’, visited the UK and promptly began criticising the government’s proposed ‘bedroom tax’ on council house tenants as being potentially harmful to the poor. While certain left-liberal sections of the media lapped her views up, she made an easy target for media organisations whose views lay further to the right. For one thing, she had been brought up a Marxist, for another she was a foreigner (always a matter of intense suspicion for some), and, worse, she appeared to have based her personal appearance upon that of Colin Hunt from *The Fast Show*. Most bizarrely of all, however, she allegedly had a penchant for sacrificing animals to dead Communists.



THEN WHAT EXACTLY HAD THE VENEZUALAN LEFT BEEN SMOKING?

The *Daily Mail* has a fine tradition of muckraking, and when it came to Ms Rolnik, they dredged up a real beauty. According to testimony the paper’s reporters traced back to Rolnik’s sister Suely, the UN official was an “avid follower” of *candomblé*, a kind of Brazilian spirit-cult of African origin which *FT*-readers are most likely to be familiar with from the works of Guy Lyon Playfair. Her membership of this voodoo-like religion, however, was not incompatible with the fact that she had been raised a Marxist – far from it. By profession, Raquel Rolnik is first and foremost an academic, architect and urban planner – but, in order to qualify for such impressive positions, she of course first had to go away and study. Whilst doing so, though, according to Suely, Rolnik became “contaminated” by exposure to competing philosophies. Because of these regrettable ideological lapses, it appears that Rolnik came to think that the vengeful spirit of her life’s first idol, Karl Marx, was haunting her. Seeing as *candomblé* is a spirit-cult, though, it seems that Ms Rolnik did not consider the idea of the committed materialist Marx’s immaterial spirit haunting her to be any kind of contradiction in terms, and accordingly sacrificed a live animal (possibly a chicken) to him so that he would leave her alone. Let’s hope he did.[10]

A more widespread example of the surprisingly syncretic nature of Marxism, though, can be found in the spread throughout South America of a religious movement known as ‘liberation theology’, which combines Catholicism with left-wing economics and politics. It is well known that Jesus professed himself to be on the side of the poor, famously telling his followers (Matthew 19:24) that “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God”. Taking this kind of thing as a cue, the movement’s adherents tried to realign the Catholic Church so that its loyalties lay mainly with the poverty-stricken, and some reinterpreted the Bible as showing that Jesus was a Marxist. If Jesus was indeed a Communist, however, then didn’t this then mean that Communists were *inherently* holy? Many came to think so, including, apparently, some on the Venezuelan left. In such political and religious developments we probably find the true roots of an

Santo Hugo Chávez del 23

ABOVE AND TOP: The newly inaugurated Santo Hugo Chavez del 23 chapel, at the 23 de Enero neighbourhood in Caracas, near the museum where the remains of President Chavez lay in March 2013.

BOTH PHOTOS: JUAN BARRETO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

JUAN BARRETO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

CRISTO
Primer Revolucionario
ALFA Y OMEGA
GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left), expected his old friend to return, along with Christ and the Mahdi. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Liberation theology in South America had earlier made the link between Jesus's ministry and teaching and Marxism. Mourners at Chávez's funeral carry banners showing "Christ, the First Revolutionary"

indistinct face on some rocks being seen as that of Hugo Chávez rather than that of Jesus Christ, as it undoubtedly would have been had it popped up elsewhere in the world.

DIALECTICAL IMMATERIALISM

In his youth, Chávez seriously considered becoming a priest. In his own formative years, the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin actually went so far as to enter a seminary. Unlike Chávez, however, Stalin eventually ended up dynamiting churches. This is the stereotype we tend to have today of totalitarian left-wing governments: atheistic, anti-clerical, worshipping scientific and military progress and the Party more than any transcendental monotheistic God. It has often been said, indeed, that movements like Communism and Maoism are in effect secular, godless religions by another name, and one element of all this which seems particularly relevant to the current situation in Venezuela is the occasionally creepy attitude of some Communists towards the dead bodies of their ideological leaders.

If you have ever gone to the mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square to gawp at Lenin's corpse, then chances are that you will have thought his preservation was just intended as being some kind of slightly macabre memorial to the man. You would be wrong. In fact, what you were looking at was a primitive attempt at cryogenics. During Lenin's time as Soviet leader, his People's Commissar of Foreign Trade, Leonid Krasin, had such quasi-religious faith in the new 'people's science' that would be unleashed by the Russian Revolution that he was moved to make ridiculous pronouncements such as: "That time will come, when the liberation of mankind, using all the might of science and technology... will be able to resurrect great historical figures" – figures just like Lenin, who died in 1924. As detailed in a recent book by the bracingly pessimistic philosopher John Gray, Krasin was involved in embalming Lenin's body as part of a so-called 'Immortalisation Commission', which also designed his shrine. Lenin was not necessarily intended to lie within his glass coffin forever, though; one day, when Soviet science had advanced far enough, he was actually expected to smash his way out! [11] Perhaps the biggest irony of all this, though, is that if Krasin really had managed to resurrect Lenin in the years following his death, Stalin would most likely have just had him shot anyway...

Krasin, then, believed that Lenin would walk once more, just as Ahmadinejad appears to believe Chávez will. One would be a religious resurrection, the other scientific. This seems to reveal in microcosm the unconscious millenarian and eschatological strain that certain commentators have long detected in Communist and totalitarian movements. Just as Christians felt that human civilisation would ultimately progress towards a 'New Jerusalem' under Christ, so did many atheistic socialists feel that their own equivalent Holy City would one day come to pass under the competing aegis of Marx and Engels. In one version of this myth, the 'saved' are all Christians; in the other, they are all Communists. It is highly revealing that, whenever hard-line socialists occasionally deign to imagine the existence of other supernatural worlds beyond our own, they are always filled with their own kind. Just as no Christian would expect to find a Satanist in Heaven, no liberation theology-loving Marxist would expect to meet an unreconstructed capitalist in their own version of paradise.

Great Marxists of the past will never really rise again, however, not even Hugo Chávez. To be fair to the late, lamented El Commandante, though, he did do some good for the very poorest of his people, making some real advances in public healthcare and education (albeit at the cost of many other things a nation needs). By making unconscious use of the esoteric and pseudo-scientific left-wing traditions outlined above, however, his less inspirational successor does his memory no favours and, indeed, makes it an open target for mockery. One hopes that, come the end of this whole sorry affair, Nicolás Maduro is revealed as the *real* dead man walking in Venezuelan politics. **FT**

NOTES

[1] Quote taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Chávez.

[2] www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/mar/07/ahmadinejad-chavez-resurrected-too-far.

[3] Quote taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolas_Maduro.

[4] *Times*, 13 Aug 2013.

[5] *Times*, 6 Nov 2013.

[6] www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/09/us-venezuela-economy-idUSBRE9A808C20131109.

[7] *Times*, 13 Aug 2013.

[8] www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2481553/Hugo-Chavezs-face-mysteriously-appears-tunnel-wall-diggers-drill-Venezuela.html.

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[10] *Daily Mail*, 12 Sept 2013.

[11] John Gray, *The Immortalisation Commission: The Strange Quest to Cheat Death*, Allen Lane 2011.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is a regular FT writer whose books include *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming from CFZ Press) *The Hidden Folk*. He is not a natural friend of the Left, and is clearly suffering from false consciousness.

THE FIRST FORTEANS

5. *ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: PART TWO*

Who were the First Forteans? British fortean lineage began in the early 1930s, when Charles Fort was still alive and his books quite rare in these isles. **BOB RICKARD** continues his rummage for our fortean roots.

PETER WESTON COLLECTION

LEFT: EFR holds court outside the King's Court Hotel, Bayswater, venue for the 1957 World SF convention. **BELOW:** An early collaboration with Leslie Johnson appeared in *Astounding Stories* in July 1937.

As soon as Eric Frank Russell (EFR) discovered the books of Charles Fort, notes his biographer John Ingham, he became a vocal and ardent disciple, finding in Fort "a brand of eccentric and subversive individualism that chimed with his own".[1] Understanding this aspect of EFR's personality is important because of his unique role in bridging the communities of science fiction (SF) and forteana... and it begins with his military roots.

His father was a career NCO, serving several decades in the Royal Engineers. Consequently, EFR was born on 6 January 1905 in Sandhurst, Berkshire, while his father taught engineering to officers at the Royal Military College there. As a military family, the Russells were constantly on the move, with postings around the UK and abroad, before they settled in the Liverpool area in 1920. By then, EFR was 15 and as soon as he left school he also trained as an engineer.

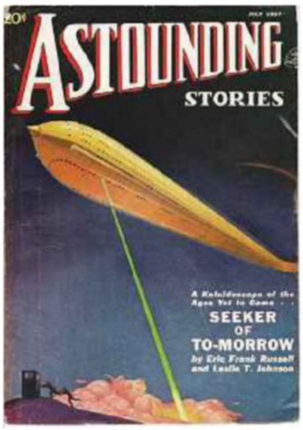
In 1922, aged 17½, he enlisted in the King's Regiment, which, being part of the Territorial Army reserve, allowed him to train as a surveyor. Not long after that, he chose a career as a travelling salesman for a local manufacturer of metal parts – a job he kept up for more than 40 years, even while he found success writing science fiction. He finally quit both in 1959 when a heart attack forced him to retire.

He was a great fan of American SF, crime and thriller novels through his youth; but it was most probably Leslie Johnson – the fellow Liverpudlian whom he met in 1935 through their shared interest in SF and the British Interplanetary Society[2] – who first encouraged the young EFR to write. This bore fruit a couple of years later, when the pair wrote a novella, 'Seeker of Tomorrow', and sold it to the leading US SF magazine *Astounding Stories*, appearing in its July 1937 issue.

THERE IS A RUMOUR THAT RUSSELL WORKED IN A DIVISION OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE ALONGSIDE BOND CREATOR IAN FLEMING

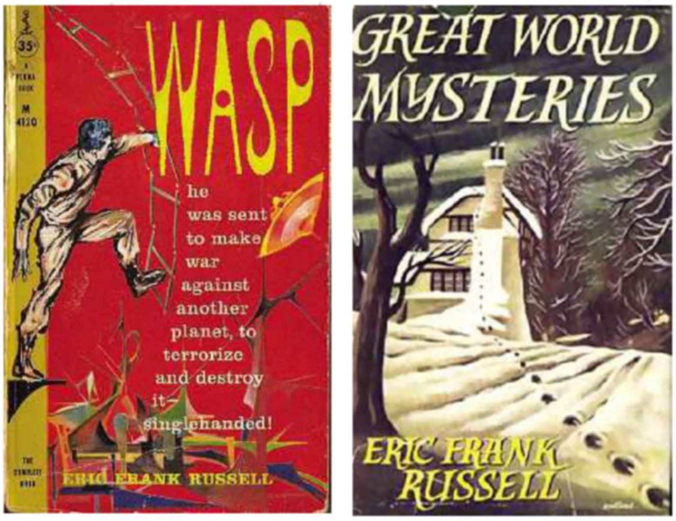
Russell became hugely productive and quickly joined the very small band of British writers who were regularly favoured first by Frederick Tremaine and then by John W Campbell, the two most influential American editors of the day. As Ingham points out, EFR was quite naturally someone the UK fans looked up to; not only was he older and taller than most of them, he was an international star. He also had an effortless ability to dominate any gathering with his charisma and storytelling, which he spiced with vulgar language and *double entendres*. I'll say more about this next time.

Despite a reputation for being a good host, EFR kept his private life private; he was happy visiting but rarely received anyone at home. Perhaps because his commercial travelling kept him away, he only ever attended two fan conventions; the first UK SF convention in Leeds, in January 1937, and the 1957 World SF Convention held in London. This latter was the first to be held in Europe and memorable for the attendance of a large American contingent including Forrest Ackerman, John W Campbell, and Sam Moskowitz.


20¢
JULY 1937
ASTOUNDING
STORIES
A Kaleidoscope of the Ages Yet to Come · · ·
SEEKER OF TO-MORROW
by Eric Frank Russell and Leslie T. Johnson

In September 1939, Britain declared war on Nazi Germany. Barely a month later, the British Interplanetary Society voted to suspend itself for the duration of the war. EFR, already losing interest in the BIS, switched his attention to the Fortean Society. The Science Fiction Association, likewise, officially disbanded, leaving UK SF fans without formal representation until the British Science Fiction Association formed in 1958.

Russell waited until July 1941 before he, like many SF fans, enlisted in the RAF – "the youngest and easily the most glamorous of the three services" – and certainly one that appealed to young rocketeers. He was selling stories across the pond and, like his correspondent Arthur C Clarke and several other prominent SF fans, had launched his own chain letter to keep in touch with scattered friends.[3] Where Clarke's 'Fan-Mail' circulated amongst


35¢
A PERMA BOOK
M 4120
WASP
he was sent to make war against another planet, to terrorize and destroy it—singlehanded!
ERIC FRANK RUSSELL
GREAT WORLD MYSTERIES
ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

ABOVE LEFT: EFR's novel *Wasp* was rumoured to be based on his supposed wartime experiences in a division of Naval Intelligence. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A genuine wartime experience with 'Satan's Footprints' made it into his 1957 book *Great World Mysteries*.

British fans, Russell's 'American Melange' had a transatlantic circulation that undoubtedly included his new-found fortean friends in the USA.

When EFR was called up in 1941 he was told he was too old to train as a fighter pilot and was assigned to radio operations. Billeted in London through 1942, he managed to see some friends and fans, including 'Poltergeist Chibbett' and, when they could, they teamed up to investigate paranormal phenomena.

Russell attended several specialist electronics courses, resulting in him being put in charge of mobile signals and radar units in East Anglia. He once boasted of "dodging an afternoon drill" by inventing something which he hoped might help the war effort – he never did say what the device was – spending the afternoon instead "making out drawings and a full specification of my brain-wave".[4] It was just the kind of dodge of which his story characters might approve.

It is possible that this tale was conflated into the persistent rumour that EFR, during WWII, worked in a 'Double Cross' type division of Naval Intelligence, alongside James Bond's creator Ian Fleming, inventing ways to confound the Japanese. It was also rumoured that this experience was fictionalised in EFR's 1957 novel *Wasp*. Alas for the legend, even with his extensive access to Russell's papers, John Ingham could find nothing to back up this claim, or any indication that EFR served anywhere but in the RAF. Research by Steve Dandois and others has determined that the rumour originated with SF author Jack L Chalker's introduction to an American reprint of *Wasp*. Chalker (1944-2005) never cited his sources, but a footnote by fellow US SF author and editor Lester del Rey (1915-1993) declared that "most of the facts used in this introduction came from letters written over the years to Chalker and mutual friends".[5] Did EFR tell a whopper to Chalker? We'll never know.

Active service saw EFR's mobile radar unit cross France and Belgium and into Germany by the end of the war. On the way, he had a genuine fortean experience. In January 1945, in Belgium, on a snow covered hillside near Everberg, he saw what he called "the Devil's hoof marks" – a reference to the classic fortean account of an extensive single line of hoof-like imprints across miles of fields and roofs in Devon, in 1855 (see **Fortean Studies (1994), Vol 1, pp71-150**). The original incident might well have been overlooked had not Fort rescued it from a back number of the *Illustrated London News*. EFR was elated. "Wonderfully, they were first seen by me," he recalled later, "and I could hardly believe my eyes". He traced the imprints for half a mile until they ended in a small wood. He brought them to the attention of members of his unit, but they were not interested. In another typical fortean motif, "three cameras were available, all empty, and not a film to be got for love or money".[6]

After the war, Russell settled back into writing at his family home in Bootle. The Russells moved again, in 1949, to a mock-Tudor house in Dale Hey, Cheshire, where EFR lived for the remainder of his life. The 1950s, notes Ingham, was EFR's most productive decade – he penned 65 stories – after which his output "dwindled away to almost nothing". While most of these stories were "thoughtful and humorous", EFR's non-fiction commentary increasingly mirrored his fortean friend Tiffany Thayer's slide into crankiness. For example, in a rare article on 'The Flying Saucers' for *Tomorrow* magazine (March 1952), EFR favoured a conspiracy theory, claiming that ordinary people – he called them "serfs" – were being tricked by authorities into believing they were all illusions and misperceptions.

Besides UFOs and conspiracies, EFR wrote some reports on out-of-place artefacts and other anomalous discoveries in archæology. Ingham also discovered that a 1,000-word article, 'Astral Artillery' – on another of Fort's topics, the 'Barisal Guns', cannon-like explosions in the sky over Barisal, a village at the mouth of the Ganges to which Fort added a number of similar cases – was sold to *Astounding* in 1941 but never published; and another, on the mysterious trackways of Malta, suffered a similar fate. "Strangely, both topics were also omitted from *Great World Mysteries*," EFR's first non-fiction book, said Ingham.

What was included in *Great World Mysteries* (1957) was mostly culled from Fort's books – the *Mary Celeste* mystery, spontaneous human combustion, sea monsters, Easter Island, levitations, and early UFOs – all with the addition of some modern news reports and a surprisingly dull commentary. It also, of course, had a chapter on 'Satan's Footprints', detailing his own 1945 experience in Belgium. He jests that, in case the culprit turns out to be a bird, "some day, ornithologists may give credit where it is due and graciously name it 'Russell's snow-runner'".

Russell's first and most famous novel, *Sinister Barrier*, inspired by Fort's work, was accepted by John Campbell at *Astounding* in November 1938 and serialised in Street & Smith's new title *Unknown*, beginning as the cover story of the inaugural May 1939 issue. It is said that Campbell disliked the original ending – which left Earth at the mercy of aliens – and EFR agreed to rewrite it, giving Earthlings the upper hand. EFR also agreed to – but didn't like – Campbell's change of title from *Forbidden Acres* to *Sinister Barrier*. In later life, he admitted: "I've never liked that title, mainly because I know of at least four books titled Sinister Something-or-Other."

The story is set in a parallel and future Earth in which the USA is threatened by overwhelming forces from Asia. Russell's protagonist discovers (mainly by misadventure) that humans are being controlled by invisible spherical entities that hide behind a 'jammed' part of the electro-magnetic spectrum – the titular "sinister barrier of our limitations". These 'Vitons' feast, like vampires, on humanity's suffering, much of which they cruelly engineer. Having found a way to provoke the Vitons and make them visible, our hero leads humanity's revolt against the ethereal parasites.

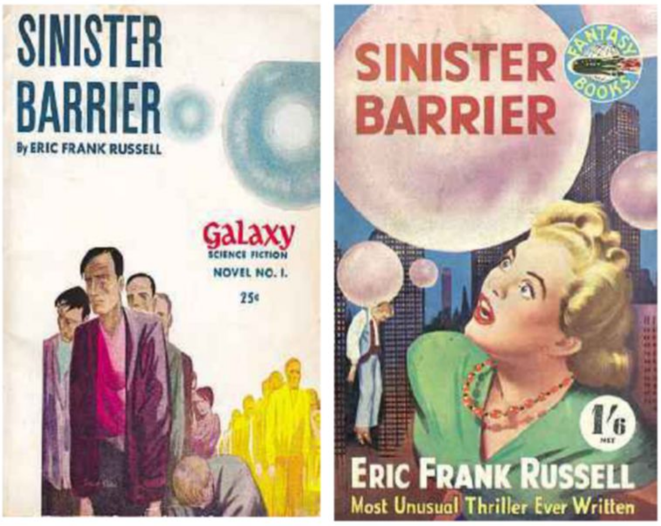
The story received worldwide and rapturous approval. When the series was repackaged as a novel in 1950, EFR explained its genesis in an introduction. Even before he discovered Fort's books, he had been collecting news reports of strange stories, and since *Sinister Barrier*'s publication readers had sent him many more newsclippings. "Despite my possession of a highly suggestive mountain of evidence, none of it jelled into a story until three Americans came at me." The first asked: "Why don't we get peace since everyone wants it?" The second presented a paraphrase of Fermi's Paradox: "If there are extraterrestrial races out there, why haven't they visited us already?" The third, EFR wrote, was Charles Fort: "Casually, but devastatingly, he said, 'I think we are property'. And that is the plot of *Sinister Barrier*."[7]

Ingham discovered a letter by EFR, written 10 years before he died, making an uncharacteristic admission. "I honestly believed that *SB* was the very first story about parasitic mastery. I was wrong. Years later I found that Edmund Hamilton had done it long before." This was a reference to Hamilton's 1931 story 'The Earth-Owners'. Russell continues: "When I met Ed in New York City [in 1939], I did not know this fact and he didn't mention it."

It has been noted elsewhere that EFR's writing style, with rapid-fire slang and witty banter, made him seem more American than British. He has also been criticised for splashes of what seemed like racism. In *Dreadful Sanctuary* (1948), for instance, he suggested that the different human races originated from different planets of the Solar System. Another example occurs in his second non-fiction book, *The Rabble Rousers* (1963), a collection of sardonic essays on now well-known fortean themes of conspiracy and the ‘madness of crowds’, which includes the Dreyfus affair, the McCarthy hysteria and the Florida land boom. He mocks poor Dreyfus’s French persecutor as “a myopic snail guzzler and the leading idiot in this disgusting pantomime”. [8]

But to EFR’s credit, and unusually for the period, he showed refreshing balance generally. He praised Dreyfus’s supporters “who showed intelligence, loyalty, and courage in the face of such nonsense” as one reviewer put it. Similarly, his 1941 story ‘Jay Score’ is credited with anticipating the *Star Trek*-like racially mixed crew of a starship. Other stories featured coloured and female protagonists, and even deliberate anti-racism as in ‘Fast Falls the Eventide’ (1952), which roots for the equality of all sentient beings – which is probably as close to religion as the usually atheistic Russell gets.

In 1941, EFR described himself thus: “Forteanishly, I am a hyper-atheist.” In another rare attempt at a biographical footnote EFR writes: “I was educated by Robert Ingersoll, Charles Hoy Fort, and WE ‘Bill’ Harney”. Fort we know about, but significantly Ingersoll (1833-1899) was a veteran of the US Civil War, a lawyer and orator famous for his defence of agnosticism. Bill Harney (1895-1962) was an Australian outback boundary-rider who served in the Australian Imperial Force on WWI’s Western Front, and later was a writer and champion of Australian aboriginal culture. Harney is also significant here because he was undoubtedly EFR’s model for a simple man whose native wit confounds the powerful, the bureaucratic and the sophisticated.



ABOVE: Early editions of EFR’s *Sinister Barrier*, partly inspired by Fort. **OPPOSITE:** *Next of Kin*; in this edition appearing under its earlier title of *The Space Willies*.

Generally, Russell was pleased that *Sinister Barrier* had “introduced Fort and his ideas to a world of science-fiction then growing weary of the Buck Rogers stuff”, but if he had a message at all it was that “You can beat the system”. The themes of non-co-operation – the aliens in his 1951 story ‘And Then There Were None’ were called Gands and practiced Mahatma Gandhi’s *ahimsa*, or non-violent resistance – subversion and insubordination are reiterated through much of his post-war output.

The *SF Encyclopedia* describes this novel ‘genre’ as “quirky, anti-bureaucratic satire” featuring “militaristic humans confronted by frustrating cultures” or “unimaginative aliens” versus “inventive humans”. Some variants were grafted onto detective, thriller or shorts-with-a-twist-in-the-tale formats, such as ‘Three to Conquer’ (1955), featuring telepathy and mind-controlling viruses, and ‘With a Strange Device’ (1964), which anticipated an MK-ULTRA type mind-control weapon.

PETER WESTON COLLECTION

LEFT: EFR (centre back) in the audience at the 1957 London World SF Convention. Robert and Barbara Silverberg in front row, and Dave & Ruth Kyle behind them.

His fast-talking heroes call this strategy ‘Baloney Baffles Brains’ (BBB); the exemplar of which is EFR’s story ‘Alamagoosa’ (1955). It may be a coincidence but, that same year, the *Phil Silvers TV Show* (1955-1959) went to air in the USA, with ‘Sergeant Bilko’ personifying the verbal trickster.

The best-loved variation, one most often mentioned by fans, is *Next of Kin* (1959). The novel centres on John Leeming, a scout-ship pilot, characterised by a reviewer on wiki as “every sergeant’s worst nightmare – immune to discipline and punishment, and given to random acts of defiance, such as wearing his cap backwards on parade for no particular reason”. He crash-lands behind enemy lines with a mission to demoralise them. Captured and imprisoned, he hoaxes the aliens into believing that humans have ghost-like alter egos who will ruthlessly avenge any hurt done to them, pretending to talk to his own via a gizmo be constructs from bits of wood and wire he finds in his cell.

What lifts the story to the top of this genre is the literary device that EFR invented to present exquisitely surreal prose as enchanting and mysterious as anything Alice heard in Wonderland. Before being captured, Leeming eavesdrops on some interplanetary radio communication. The alien language is, well, alien, but sounds like English, and he finds he can interject random nonsense (which some fans can recite by heart) with the desired effect:

First voice: “Mayor Snorkum will lay the cake.”

Second voice: “What for the cake be laid by Snorkum?”

First voice: “He will starch his mustache.”

Second voice: “That is night-gab. How can he starch a tepid moose?”

They spent the next 10 minutes in what sounded like an acrimonious argument. Leeming suffered it until something snapped. “Moose or mouse, make up your goddam minds!”

This produced a moment of dumbfounded silence before the first voice harshed: “Gnof, can you lap a pie-chain?”

“No, he can’t,” shouted Leeming, giving the unfortunate Gnof no chance to brag of his ability as a pie-chain lapper.

Another pause, then Gnof resentfully told all and sundry: “I shall lambast my mother.”

“Dirty dog,” said Leeming. “Shame on you.”

The other voice now informed, mysteriously: “Mine is a fat one.”

“I can imagine,” Leeming agreed.

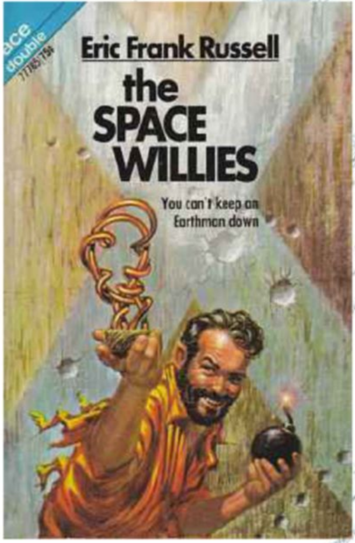
“Clam-shack?” demanded Gnof in tones clearly translatable as “Who is that?”

“Mayor Snorkum,” Leeming told him.

In a briefing on EFR’s stories written in September 2013 (originally intended for *FT*) the US writer and fortean Steve Dandois noted: “There’s good reason that the oft-reprinted and much-loved *Wasp* is the only book that bestselling author Neil Gaiman was ever moved to option or adapt. He sorted out the legalities and was poised to pen the screenplay… ‘and then’, as he recounts, ‘September the 11th 2001 happened’. What was the problem? As fantasy humourist Terry Pratchett declared on the cover of one edition of *Wasp*, ‘I can’t imagine a funnier terrorists’ handbook’.”

There are two possible sources for EFR’s cynical nonconformism. The first he shares with his mentor, Charles Fort. EFR described his father as a disciplinarian whom his mother “suffered with Quaker-like patience and finally reformed him". I can't help feeling that the seeds of EFR's plots featuring the subversion of rigid authoritarianism began – echoing Fort's antagonism to his own strict father – in the child's rebellion against such paternal power.[9]

This rebellious streak was undoubtedly reinforced by EFR's observation of military life and types: from his father's camp postings, certainly, but also from his time as a teenager in the King's Regiment and later in military service in WWII. The British forces at that time were riddled with class divisions; commissioned officers were generally drawn from university-educated or upper-class families, while NCOs and lesser ranks would typically be working-class types. Intelligent chaps like EFR would have seen slavish adherence to nonsensical rules and an inability to adapt to change as evidence of the incompetence of the officers above him. This kind of surrealism was exploited in the postwar period by the BBC's *Goon Show* on the radio, the British film *Carry on Sergeant* (1958), and US TV's wily Sgt. Bilko. The behaviour of EFR's bolshy protagonists – ranging from devious non-co-operation to outright sabotage – spoke directly to the experience of his post-war audience. **FT**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have made this instalment without the generous help of the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are...

Rob Hansen for his two archives: THEN: A History of UK Science Fiction Fandom (1930-1980): www.ansible.co.uk/Then/ and FIAWOL: www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/index.htm. Dave Langford for his Ansible archive: http://news.ansible.co.uk/. Peter Weston for permission to use images from the various photographs he has collected, and for his Relapse: http://efanzines.com/Prolapse/. Jill Godfrey for permission to use Harold Gottliffe's photos from several of these sites; and John Ingham, of course.

NB: For ease of reading, I omit many references here – but a fully referenced version will follow (eventually) on my CFI blogsite: http://blogs.forteana.org/bob

REFERENCES

1 Nearly all the biographical details (and unreferenced citations) are drawn from John L Ingham's biography of Eric Frank Russell (*Into Your Tent*, 2010), the result of decades' worth of patient detective work. It is available from coldtonnage.com

2 See First Forteans #2, 'The Rocket Boys' **FT309:50-51**.

3 both were based upon Chibbett's model – see FF#3, 'Round Robins of the Damned', **FT310:50-51**.

4 Fantast fanzine (November 1941).

5 Steve Dandois, personal correspondence, 26 Oct 2010. In his review of *Wasp*, Rupert Neethling also hints at EFR's likely 'secret service'. "The seemingly limitless inventiveness with which [EFR's hero] Mowry goes about his business, while repeatedly avoiding capture by a hair's breadth, calls to mind Lois McMaster Bujold's Miles Vorkosigan and Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat. Wasp doesn't share their slickness, however: there is something more grittily real about this novel (hence my suspicion that Russell knew of which he spoke)." www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/wasp.htm

6 EFR's account appeared in his *Great World Mysteries* (1957); and in Paul Willis, 'The Devil's Hoofmarks: An Unsolved Enigma', *INFO Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (Spring 1967) pp18-21.

7 The full quotation is from chapter 12 of Fort's *Book of the Damned* (1919): "I think we are property... That once upon a time, this earth was No-Man's land, that other worlds explored and colonised here, and fought amongst themselves for possession, but that now it's owned by something... all others warned off." In fact, the inspiration could just as well have come from chapter 20: "It may be that we're highly esteemed by super-epicures somewhere... mysterious disappearances. I think we're fished for... or our use to some other mode of seeming that has a legal right to us."

8 EFR "was perhaps the first transatlantic science-fiction writer, an Englishman who successfully passed for a native in the American magazines." Arthur D Hlavaty, review of *Major Ingredients: The Selected Stories of Eric Frank Russell* (NESFA Press, 2000): www.maroney.org/hlavaty/documents/Eric_Frank_Russell.html

9 See Fort's own account among his autobiographical notes called 'Many Parts', collected and presented by Mr X in *Fortean Studies*, vol.1, pp8-49 (1994); and Damon Knight, *The Prophet of the Unexplained* (1970), chapters 1 and 2.

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forum

Cameron versus forteana?

IAN SIMMONS worries that government response to the problem of children being exposed to pornography means that *FT* could vanish from the Internet.

IAN SIMMONS is a longtime FT contributor and Science Communication Director of the Centre for Life in Newcastle, a leading hands-on science centre.

ABOVE: Has David Cameron's desire to be seen to "do something" about children's exposure to pornography led to a situation where forteana could fall foul of Internet filtering?

PAUL ROGERS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Should 2013 be remembered for anything, it will probably be as the year when any illusion we might still have harboured that the Internet was a libertarian geek playground outside the control of state agencies was comprehensively shattered. Edward Snowden's revelations about exactly how much US and UK security agencies had utterly traduced every aspect of the online world left many stunned, and not a few wondering whether it was all a massive disinformation exercise designed to project US omnipotence.

However, that was not the only thing to emerge in 2013 that reminded us that the dead hand of control now lies heavy on the net. Closer to home, Prime Minister David Cameron decided to respond to Mumsnet-style fretting about the possibility that children on line might be exposed to pornography with a classic "something must be done!" gesture, the development of a national filter across all ISPs that prevents such things appearing in UK search results for British users. Not that plenty of filtering options don't already exist for concerned parents to invoke, but these need you to opt into. This new layer of censorship is to be opt out: i.e. your results are automatically filtered unless you actively say "Yes, I want porn". As a result, it covers everyone, not just those who can be bothered to apply filters, so consequently all adults, not just children. In doing this, the UK joins that other bastion of free thought, Iran, whose 'Halal Internet' filters out non-Islamic material in a very similar way to that proposed by Cameron, and China, whose national firewall is apparently admired by creators of the proposed UK system.

As tech blogger and net security critic Cory Doctorow recently pointed out in the *Guardian*, [1] never mind the implications of government mandated censorship, the proposed system both over-and underblocks; it stops people accessing sites to do with sexual health, pornography addiction treatment, rape-crisis centres and other similarly useful subjects, but at the same time actually fails to completely block porn. It also gives parents a false sense of security and leaves them unprepared for dealing with their children's encounters with porn when they do occur; so a general fail all round, but at least the government has *done something.*

So, what has this got to do with forteans? Many of us have children we would like protected, so apart from a general opposition to censorship and objection to idiotic half-thought-out measures it ought to be peripheral to our concerns oughtn't it? But while porn has got all the publicity, the government has taken the opportunity to bundle in a whole lot of other catch-all *Daily Mail* dog-whistle areas into the package. In addition to the porn your filter will keep out 'violent material' (including slasher movies?), extremist/terrorist content (who decides who is an extremist?), sites relating to anorexia, suicide, alcohol and smoking (including, presumably those aimed at prevention and therapy as it's almost impossible to differentiate using algorithms) and 'esoteric material'. As none of these things come with an actual definition it's impossible to deduce what is actually meant by 'esoteric' in this context, and experience shows that when filtering the web the default mode is to filter out the widest possible spread of material and then refine it later as people identify things that shouldn't be filtered out. But if you can't find it in the first place, how will you know it's there so you can ask for it to be unfiltered?

'Esoteric' is presumably in there so that impressionable young minds will not be tempted by Satanic child abusers, New Age suicide cults and any vaguely non-mainstream religions (never mind that there are some spectacularly harmful versions of Christianity out there that presumably would be fine to view, as they aren't esoteric).

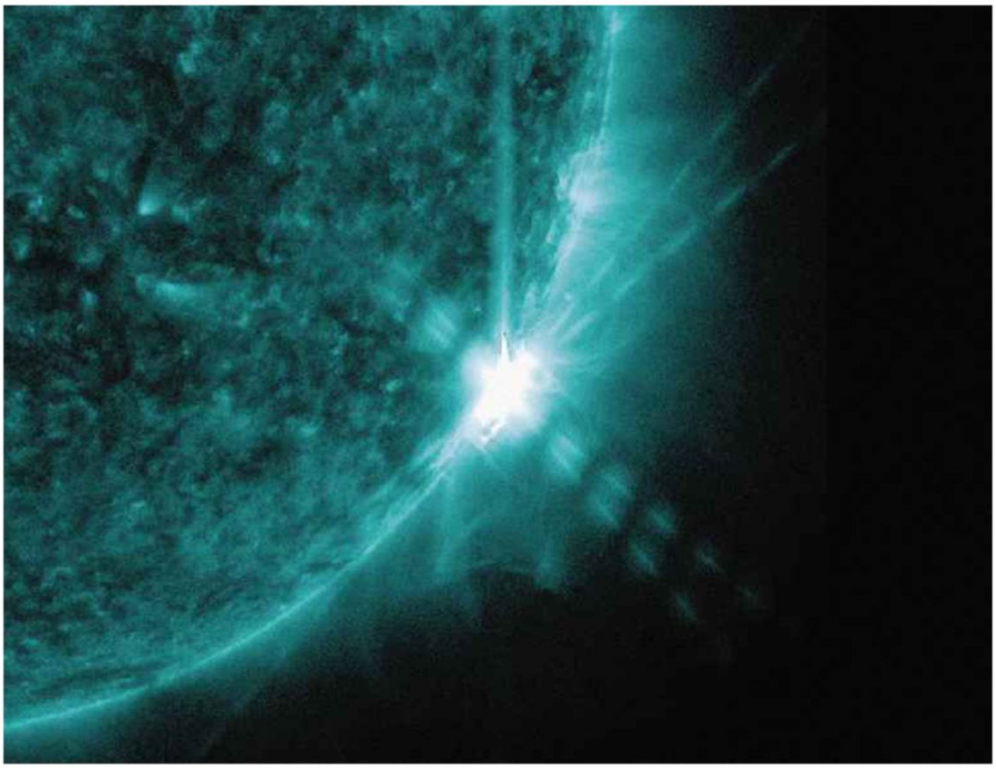
But esoteric can just as easily encompass the entire range of forteana, should you look at it that way. Is Bigfoot esoteric? To some, maybe. Spontaneous human combustion? Social panics? To certain conservative minds anything that disturbs the consensus reality is esoteric and so potentially needs to be filtered out. Given that *FT* covers the whole spectrum of the occult, barmy religious practices and goodness knows what else that is likely to appal the average *Daily Mail* reader, would anyone ever be able to find us on line? My strong suspicion is that we will have no chance, and will be cast out to share an inaccessible outer fringe of the web with Long Dong Silver, Abu Qatada, the Marlborough Man and the pro-ana crowd. This is clearly crazy when you can buy the magazine in any corner newsagent.

If you think this whole thing is insane and that we should be free to make our own decisions about whether we get to see *FT* or anything else on line, rather than have to opt out of mandatory filters, there's a petition available to sign up to at http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/51746.

In the meantime, I've signed up for a VPN, a virtual private network, which enables me to access the net without sites being blocked, but if you want to find one, do it soon, as access to tools of this kind will be blocked by the filters as well.

Space apocalypse ahoy!

MATT SALUSBURY examines the latest end-of-the-world threat from outer space… and wonders why no one seems to have noticed it.



NASA / SOLAR DYNAMICS OBSERVATORY

LEFT: An M5.9 flare appears on the lower right of the Sun on 7 June 2013.

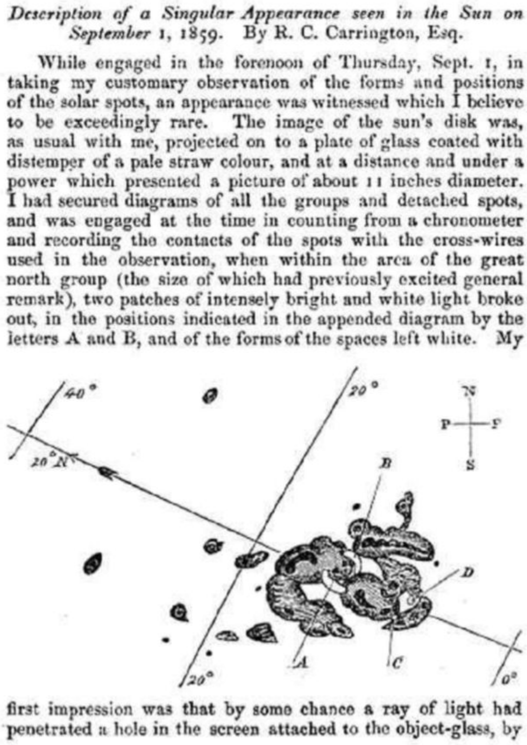
MATT SALUSBURY is a freelance journalist, regular contributor to *FT* and author of *Pygmy Elephants: On the Track of the World's Largest Dwarfs* (CFZ, 2013).

Shortly before the 21 December 2012 end-of-the-world due date, a confident NASA released early its "Why The World Didn't End Yesterday" video. This rubbished the "Mayan prophecy" baktun long count Doomsday scenario (see **FT285:33-47**, **FT300:33-43** and passim) – and anticipated the next end-of-the-world panic: solar storms! [1]

We've now just passed the peak of the 11-year-long Solar Cycle 24, which ends in 2020. The nightmare solar storm scenario would be a repeat of the Carrington Event of 1859.

The Carrington Event – named after the Scottish astronomer Richard Carrington, who observed it – was what we would now call a Coronal Mass Ejection (CME). It sent a burst of charged particles out of the Sun to slam into the Earth's magnetic field. So powerful was the Carrington Event that the telegraph machines of the day caught fire, and continued to type even after they'd been disconnected. The Aurora Borealis was visible as far south as Cuba, and woke up campers in the Rockies in the middle of the night; they thought they were in bright daylight.

BELOW: Richard Carrington's drawing of sunspots, from 1859.



Description of a Singular Appearance seen in the Sun on September 1, 1859. By R. C. Carrington, Esq.

While engaged in the forenoon of Thursday, Sept. 1, in taking my customary observation of the forms and positions of the solar spots, an appearance was witnessed which I believe to be exceedingly rare. The image of the sun's disk was, as usual with me, projected on to a plate of glass coated with distemper of a pale straw colour, and at a distance and under a power which presented a picture of about 11 inches diameter. I had secured diagrams of all the groups and detached spots, and was engaged at the time in counting from a chronometer and recording the contacts of the spots with the cross-wires used in the observation, when within the area of the great north group (the size of which had previously excited general remark), two patches of intensely bright and white light broke out, in the positions indicated in the appended diagram by the letters A and B, and of the forms of the spaces left white. My

first impression was that by some chance a ray of light had penetrated a hole in the screen attached to the object-glass, by

Back in 1859, there was no heavy reliance on GPS satellites, and little by way of a national grid. There have since been warnings of the havoc that a 21st century solar storm could wreak.

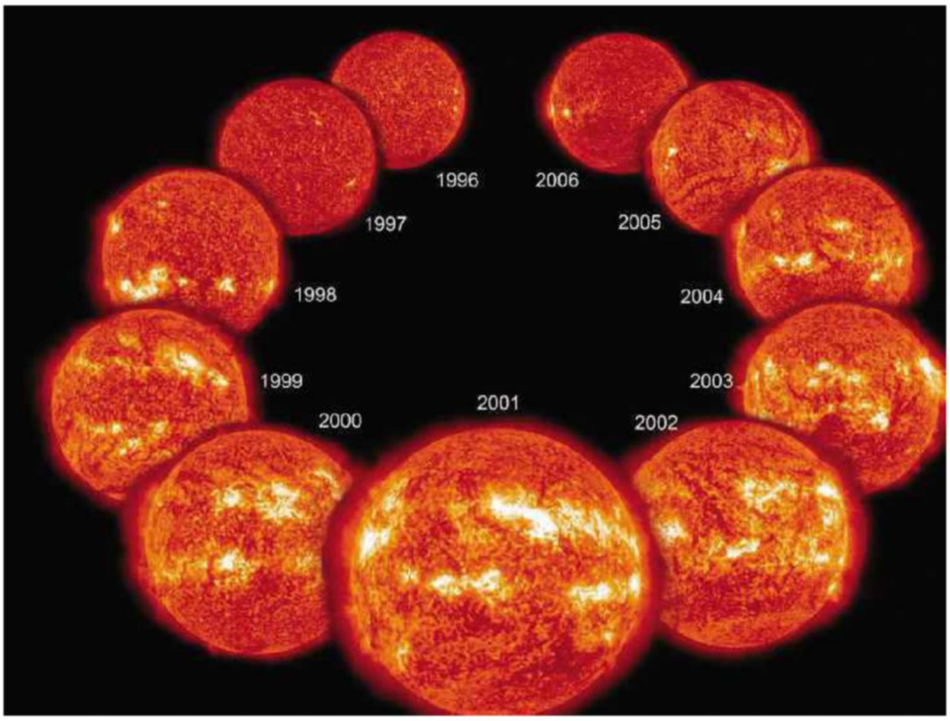
In the 'Quebec blackout' of 1989 something – probably a solar storm – crippled a power station and cut power to millions of Canadian homes, while triggering what NASA now call "electrical anomalies" across the US. There is a danger, it seems, that solar storms can turn the electrical power grid into something like a giant convection heater. And the 'Halloween storms' of 2003 disabled instruments on dozens of orbital satellites, some permanently.

With the expectation that the solar cycle would peak around mid-2013, it was predicted that GPS would go down – and that wouldn't just mean motorists losing their way. All sorts of absolutely essential stuff, from nuclear power stations to some very expensive hospital life support kit, and most technology driving the financial markets, would fail. We could be a single solar storm away from the end of civilisation.

And such geomagnetic storms could even knock planes out of the sky. Delta Airlines admitted at the end of 2013 that it had, at some expense, diverted 12 transpolar flights away from the Poles that year, fearing solar storms.

Given the readiness of so many people to get excited about some misunderstood Mesoamerican calendars, it was puzzling how extraordinarily blasé the world was about the impending civilisation-ending Solar Cycle 24 peak.

Lika Gukathakurta, head of NASA's Living With a Star Program, reassured the world in the "Why the World Didn't End Yesterday" video that "this is the wimpiest solar cycle of the last 50 years, reports to the contrary are exaggerated." But strangely, the world didn't need any reassuring. Here was the very real possibility of the End of Civilisation As We Know It – and no



NASA

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: A diagram of the last 11-year Solar Cycle, reaching its peak in 2001.

ABOVE: The magnetic solar storm arranged a colourful show of aurora borealis in the night skies of Hyvinka in Southern Finland on 31 October 2003.

one seemed even to have heard of it, let alone care about it.

Where were the tin-foil hat brigade, shouting their misanthropic solar storm rants in the bus stations and shopping centres? Nowhere to be seen. Perhaps Armageddon fatigue had set in after the Great Mayan Prophecy Disappointment. Or perhaps the solar storm scenario's technological aspects had made prophets of doom somewhat wary, triggering recollections of the Millennium Bug that never was (see **FT122:34-37**).

Rather than heading for the hills, the vast majority of people weren't even aware of the absolutely gigantic X9 ('X' denoting the strongest class of solar storm) solar storm that erupted from the Sun on 9 August 2013. Fortunately for us, the burst of plasma it spewed out was on a trajectory that was "not Earth-directed," as Joe Kunches of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration told the space.com website. "We did luck out," he added. [2]

We also appeared to luck out on 25 October 2013, when two monster X-class solar flares left the Sun, but in the event weren't up to much and went widely unnoticed.

While Spaceweather.com did report some VLF and HF radio blackouts, the dearth of CME-based apocalypse-mongering turns out to have been right on the money. By the end of 2013, Stanford University's Leif Svalgaard told the American Geophysical Union: "None of us alive have ever seen such a weak cycle." In the course of Solar Cycle 24's peak, we had learned that the lower than usual pressure of the heliosphere – the mass of charged particles and magnetic fields surrounding the Sun – meant that CMEs were able to expand more as they shot through space, dissipating their strength by the time they smacked into our own atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the aurora was visible in the Essex summer skies of 2012, and one travel agent, with an eye to the main chance, promised "with astronomers predicting the peak of the solar cycle and incredible sightings already reported, winter 2013/14 looks likely to be the best time to see the magical Aurora Borealis." The end of the world was cancelled and instead we got the world's greatest lightshow. [3]

But fear not, disappointed apocalypse watchers! The Met Office has announced that, as of Spring 2014, it would run space weather forecasts to "allow government and businesses to take swift action to ensure services are maintained". The Met Office also warned that it wasn't over yet – the "largest impacts can occur at any time during its 11 year-cycle", right up to 2020. [4]

Some Doomsday enthusiasts may be losing faith in the capacity of solar storms to frazzle us back into the Stone Age. Perhaps they will take some comfort in '2013 TV135', a "massive asteroid" identified by the Crimean Astrophysical Observatory in October as heading our way – to arrive with a force of some 2,500 megatons on 26 August 2032. Hurrah! Until you read the small print: the chance of it actually striking the Earth is around one in 63,000. The End of the World ain't what it used to be. [5]

NOTES

1 "Why The World Didn't End Yesterday", NASA Science, December 2013 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=QY_Gc1bF8ds).

2 www.space.com.

3 Blue Water Holidays – Northern Lights and Norway Coast (www.bluewaterholidays.com/northernlights).

4 Met Office: "What is Space Weather?" 20 December 2013 (www.metoffice.gov.uk/publicsector/emergencies/space-weather).

5 *Time* magazine 17 Oct 2013 (http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/10/17/this-giant-astroid-could-hit-earth-within-20-years/); *Guardian* 13 Oct 2013 (www.theguardian.com/science/across-the-universe/2013/oct/18/asteroid-2013-tv135-doomsday-again)

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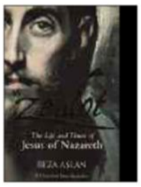
reviews

History of a roving preacher

Examining Jesus of Nazareth's times in order to illuminate His life is rewarding – He was just one of many peripatetic preachers in a land riven with rebels and zealots



Zealot

The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth

Reza Aslan

Westbourne Press 2013
Hb, 296pp, notes, bib, ind, £17.99, ISBN 9781908906274

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99

Some of the early reviews of *Zealot* attacked the book because the Iranian-American author is a Muslim turned Evangelical Christian turned Muslim: how dare he presume to comment on Jesus, the founder of Christianity? This is blinkered idiocy; trying to make sense of the confused origins of one of the world's most influential religions has to be open to scholars of all persuasions.

Aslan explains in an Author's Note that the chasm he found between Jesus the Christ and Jesus of Nazareth caused the loss of his Christian faith; it's the latter figure who impresses him. The search for "the historical Jesus" is nothing new, but Aslan's approach makes a lot of sense: he examines the Times in order to view the Life.

It's fairly well accepted now – certainly by scholars – that there was nothing particularly unusual about a roving preacher at the time of Jesus. The author names several both before and after Jesus – and not just preachers, but putative messiahs, Kings of the Jews. First-century Palestine was rife with insurgents, rebels, zealots, Jews who believed passionately that this land should be their land, and that God had appointed them to lead their people to freedom from their Roman oppressors.

And that's what a messiah was. Anything else, about God becoming man to save the entire world from their sins, came later. That concept was entirely foreign to the 1st-century Jewish mind; the Christian idea of the Christ has little connection with the Jewish messiah. Most of the radical preachers before and after Jesus either thought of themselves, or were hailed by their followers, as messiahs. And they were all executed by the Romans by crucifixion, the punishment reserved not for "thieves", the usual translation for the men hanging on either side of Jesus, but for *lestai* – bandits, rebels, political troublemakers.

Aslan also points out that Jesus' other popular activity, healing the sick, was even more commonplace. There's no point trying to judge whether he actually healed the sick. "How one in the modern world views Jesus' miraculous actions is irrelevant. All that can be known is how the people of his time viewed them." And that, he says, was as "just one of an untold number of diviners and dream interpreters, magicians and medicine men who wandered Judea and Galilee".

Controversially, Aslan says that Jesus was almost certainly illiterate, along with 98 per cent of Jews of his time; as a *tekton*, a woodworker or builder, and from a small and very poor village, he was low down the social scale.

It's often been said that the creator of Christianity wasn't Jesus but Paul. Aslan spends considerable time exploring how the ideas that became Christian theology stemmed from the diaspora Jews living well away from Jerusalem, who had little connection with the powerful culture of the Temple there, and who lived amongst, and absorbed, Greek beliefs and practices. And of course Paul was one such. More startling is his focus on what he portrays as the bitter rivalry between Paul, who never met Jesus, and the Jerusalem church, led by those who had lived and worked alongside him. When Paul inveighs against those with "another gospel", it's Peter and Jesus's brother James he's attacking. It's only after Jerusalem is effectively razed to the ground by the Romans in AD 70, and what's left of the Jerusalem church scattered, that the gospels are written – and Paul's version of Christianity, already seen in his letters, triumphs.

> **"The Gospels weren't written by eye-witnesses, let alone anyone who knew Jesus"**

The Gospels weren't written by eye-witnesses, let alone by anyone who knew Jesus of Nazareth. They were based on oral and written accounts (such as the hypothetical 'Q' that underlies the common parts of Matthew and Luke that aren't based on Mark) and their writers wrote them to fit in with their faith. The concept of factual history is relatively new; the gospels were written to promote belief in Jesus, not as genuine biography. Few scholars believe that the nativity stories are historically accurate. Aslan turns the same scalpel on the passion narratives. After the destruction of Jerusalem it was essential for the nascent movement to distance itself from any hint of Jewish nationalistic rebellion or criticism of Rome. Far from being a nice guy who really wanted to let Jesus off, as the gospels suggest, Pilate was "a man renowned for his loathing of the Jews, his total disregard for Jewish rituals and customs, and his penchant for absentmindedly signing so many execution orders that a formal complaint was lodged against him in Rome". It is "truly beyond belief", writes Aslan, that Pilate is "spending even a moment of his time pondering the fate of yet another Jewish rabble-rouser". The Gospel-writers' determination to shift the blame for Jesus's death from the Roman authorities to the Jews became "the basis for two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism".

One of the things I most like about this book is the author's forthrightness: "For every well-attested, heavily researched and eminently authoritative argument made about the historical Jesus, there is an equally well-attested, equally researched and equally authoritative argument opposing it." That is what many readers forget. Usually I prefer to have footnotes, but I can see why Aslan has placed his very detailed notes at the back of the book. For anyone wanting to get deeper into the complexities of the birth of Christianity, they make fascinating reading.

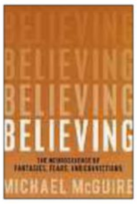
David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

EXTREMELY PERSUASIVE ACCOUNT OF JESUS THE MAN **9**

Comfort zone

Establishing beliefs is more important than working out where they come from



Believing

The Neuroscience of Fantasies, Fears, and Convictions

Michael McGuire

Prometheus Books 2013
Pb, 267pp, notes, ind, $19.95, ISBN 9781616148294
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

Prepare to look with great intensity at why and how we believe. McGuire, a psychiatrist working in neuroscience, began a journey to comprehend belief after an otherwise rational patient felt sure her parents were not really her parents. Logic could not un-convince her of the notion. This led McGuire to study monkeys to look for emotional realities about how we operate as people. The lesson: we can't outsmart our emotions, even if they make little sense. McGuire's view of belief is deterministic. Our brains really want to do it.

The believing brain achieves a state of comfort: for our credulous brains "establishing beliefs is far more important than assessing how beliefs are created or justifying them." McGuire maintains that beliefs are often the product of behind-the-scenes mental processing aimed to prevent the brain from rethinking a new response to familiar situations. This efficiency works for and against us. If deep-rooted opinions spring from social conditioning and unrecognised mental workings, this means an individual's unshakable sense of self is directly threatened.

Usually, questioning the reality of self becomes a religious matter. In looking at belief in all its complexities, McGuire spends time on faith; but this is not a faith book. The author uses faith, philosophy, psychiatry, neuroscience, sociology and even the art of storytelling to reveal how we think. Often in these pages, the word "think" could be used in place of belief. A blur forms between whether McGuire is talking about the act of believing or simply about how the brain works. This apparently is the point, but the brain does more than just believe (or so I think, um, believe).

An aspect of this book distinguishing it from the barrage of neuro-pop offerings is the concept of divides. In terms of believing, a divide is roughly the cognitive distance a person perceives between the truth and the evidence needed to prove it. An atheist and a Sunday school teacher will have different divides in terms of whether there is an afterlife. Once again this takes on a deterministic cast as McGuire argues that our brains actively work to narrow divides. Brains self-convince and hold tight to narrowed divides. Opposing viewpoints that might widen divides (i.e. you've just changed your mind) are rejected more often than we like to admit.

In total, this is not a guide to better reasoning or improved decision-making. Nor is it a chirpy celebration of the power of faith or prayer. Limited practical advice is offered besides a call for increased scepticism and the necessity of a liberal education. McGuire argues that science can teach us plenty about how belief works. However, the way we believe is determined by the organisation of the brain. For better or worse, that won't be changing much any time soon. The message is that beliefs hold us more than we hold them.

Mike Pursley

Fortean Times Verdict

ESTEEMED PSYCHIATRIST SAYS WE'RE BORN TO BELIEVE 7

Ancient Aliens on Mars

Mike Bara

Adventures Unlimited Press 2013
Pb, 218pp, illus, refs, $19.95/£16.99, ISBN 9781935487890
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

Even if, like me, you're not overly familiar with the subject, it's fairly obvious that there are some intriguing features on the surface of Mars, of which the most famous is the 'Face' of Cydonia, and also that NASA's handling of these matters has been pretty much of a public relations disaster. It's also obvious that Mike Bara is not the man to write about these subjects.

Opening with a 30-page 'Foreword' which any reputable publisher would have instantly vetoed, as it's possibly the most shamefully spiteful *ad hominem* attack on one of his critics that it's ever been my displeasure to read (worse, the criticism relates to Bara's previous book, and has nothing to do with alleged aliens on Mars). Bara spends more time attacking NASA and its spokespersons for their alleged conspiracy to cover up the truth (why they should do this we are not told) than actually presenting his evidence for an alien presence on Mars. When he does, the presentation is poorly argued and appallingly under-referenced.

It's also apparent that Bara is just as open to accusations of disingenuousness in handling his material as he claims NASA to be. As a single example, he's noticeably unforthcoming about the scale of the Martian 'monuments' he's interpreting as signs of ancient civilisation, and when we look at his comparisons with Earthly features, we soon see why. Yes, a supposed 'circular feature' on Mars may look superficially like the ruins of a circular fortress in Uzbekistan, but the first is more than 50 miles across, the second about a hundred yards: that both display features looking like rooms when seen from above, of the same relative size to the feature as a whole, is utterly irrelevant... unless, of course, Bara is arguing that the inhabitants of Mars were, perhaps, several hundred feet tall.

The book is profusely illustrated, though Bara's identification of vague shapes as a 'Sphinx', or bits of rock as pieces of machinery, strain one's credulity and would only really be interesting to psychologists studying the process of pattern recognition. Needless to say, when NASA release further photos that fail to confirm these identifications, they're instantly accused of tampering with the pictures, and the whole book is rather like reading a series of blog entries written by a spoilt, paranoid child.

If you're interested in the subject, find something else.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

THE MARTIANS DESERVE MUCH BETTER THAN THIS 3

Ghost Stories from the North of England

Ed: George White

CreateSpace Publishing 2013
Pb, 366pp, £12.00, ISBN 9781493642397
AVAILABLE FROM THE PUBLISHER

The basis for this volume are the five scarse and out-of-print pamphlets written by Rebecca Dane and Craig MacNeil between 1972 and 1982; so this book, edited by George White, is welcome. I was pleasantly surprised that the majority of the 80-odd stories were previously unknown to me; rewritten in a first-person narrative, these 'new' stories, I suspect, must have come from friend-of-a-friend legends, so assessing their truthfulness is probably impossible.

The ghosts of Raby Castle, the cursed Busby Stoop Inn chair and Stainmore's Hand of Glory are now accepted parts of North-Eastern Lore; but one wonders why the more spectacular tales have not been referred to before – or since. This does not detract from the stories; some are genuinely terrifying, and hopefully research may verify and enhance these tales. Only a handful rouse the suspicions of being fabrications, but the remainder are excellent depictions of mundane lives in the North that have been touched by the supernatural.

Paul Lee

Fortean Times Verdict

IT'S SUPERNATURAL UP NORTH – SOME GREAT GHOST TALES **7**

The New Science of Psychedelics

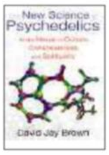
At the Nexus of Culture, Consciousness, and Spirituality

David Jay Brown

Park Street Press 2013

Pb, 352 pages, £15.99, ISBN 9781594774928 15.99

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.39



Many books from the current psychedelic renaissance reiterate what is known or focus on the florid experiences of those who have tried exotic substances such as Ayahuasca.

Brown's take on the subject is different. Using a scientific approach, he examines the place of psychedelics in our culture, our consciousness and our spirituality.

Mixing the lessons learned from his own psychedelic experiences with psychonauts and forward thinkers such as Terence McKenna, Andrew Weil, Albert Hofmann, and Rupert Sheldrake, he weaves a path through the many possibilities that psychedelics offer and links that into fortean areas such as lucid dreaming, life after death and a wide variety of unexplained phenomena.

Brown's book makes one thing abundantly clear: whatever legal status has been imposed on psychedelic drugs, they exist and their effect on individuals and culture can't be denied or legislated out of existence.

Psychedelics are a powerful tool for examining the human condition and the natural (and supernatural) world, and we ignore them at our peril. If used wisely, they can offer deep and meaningful insight and understanding of what being human on planet Earth really means.

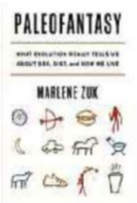
Andy Roberts

Fortean Times Verdict

A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO LOOKING AT PSYCHEDELICS **8**

Yabba dabba doo!

The fashionable Flintstones approach to modern life is a useful starting point for an examination of the science of evolution



Paleofantasy

What Evolution Really Tells Us About Sex, Diet and How We Live

Marlene Zuk

WW Norton 2013

Hb, 328pp, bib, notes, ind, $27.95, ISBN 9790393081374

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.19

As lifestyle fads go, the idea that we should try and live our lives as much as possible like those of our Palæolithic caveman ancestors because physical evolution essentially stopped then, but cultural evolution hasn't, is one of the more entertaining ones.

Adherents hang out on websites with names like *cavemanforum.com* and firmly believe we should be eating, exercising, having sex and organising our family life as closely as possible to the way our ancient ancestors did. Then, they claim, we will be able to negate the destructive aspects of modern life and maintain ourselves in the peak of fitness enjoyed by our hunter-gatherer forbearers.

Needless to say, it is not difficult to take a pop at the more delusional aspects of this approach, but apart from occasional lapses into sceptic-snide, and selective quoting of some of the more boneheaded contributors to Paleo forums, Zuk resists the urge to do so. Instead, she uses their fantasies as a starting point for examining the science of what we do know about human evolution and Palæolithic humanity.

It will come as no surprise that the main objections to adopting the diet and lifestyle of Palæolithic humans are that what we think we know about them is largely conjecture extrapolated from modern hunter-gatherer lifestyles, accompanied by very fragmentary archæological evidence, so could well be bunk, and there is little evidence that our ancient ancestors were healthier than us anyway. She also makes the very salient point that we haven't actually stopped evolving either.

The popular perception of evolution is that it is an achingly slow process, needing many, many generations and thousands of years to have an effect. This is more or less true when it comes to the evolution of new species, which is what Darwin was talking about when he set out his theory, although there are exceptions with this too, but evolutionary change in characteristics and behaviour within a species can happen with startling speed. In some species, even up to the level of vertebrates, this can happen perceptibly within maybe a generation or two, and less than 10 years.

In humans, we can demonstrate significant evolutionary change over a few tens of thousands of years, taking us no further back than the Neolithic, with the case of lactose tolerance in humans living in northern regions. This appears to have evolved with the domestication of herd animals, giving an advantage to those who could digest milk in areas where food supplies were marginal.

It is still unevenly distributed, even among the populations in which it evolved, and remains fairly rare in Sub-Saharan Africa as it is still spreading through the population.

Less fundamental evolutionary changes have affected all sorts of aspects of our lives over shorter periods too – for example, there has been a noticeable shift in the head-shape of Londoners since the mediæval period, and it is equally possible for small changes like these to shift direction several times as the selection pressures on us alter. The same will have happened to our foodstuffs too, so even if it was reasonable to eat like our distant ancestors, the actual foods we can get now have changed massively from the varieties they would have encountered.

Zuk takes all the various strands of the Paleo lifestyle to task in similar ways, making it clear that we have no more reason to believe that polygamy is more 'natural' than monogamy or that running barefoot is the best form of exercise, than that eating hunter-gatherer food is the ideal nutrition regime.

All in all, it makes for an entertaining read and an excellent primer on human evolution and what we do and don't know about our distant ancestors.

It also leaves the indelible impression that this Paleo lark is something that macho fantasists dreamed up to justify their predilection for meat-eating and unrestrained shagging.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

EVOLOUTION IS MORE THAN RED MEAT AND SHAGGING. WHO KNEW? **9**

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Royal bio like no other

The Battersea polt – who survived the French Revolution under a different moniker – was a Hitching family member for 12 years

The Poltergeist Prince of London

The Poltergeist Prince of London

The Remarkable True Story of the Battersea Poltergeist

Shirley Hitchings & James Clark

The History Press 2013
Pb/ebook, 320pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780752498034
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

This book is a rarity: a balanced collaboration between a writer and a person who was at the centre of a poltergeist haunting. Over 12 years, Shirley Hitchings and her parents were accosted by relentless tapping sounds along with objects moving on their own, the occasional spontaneous fire, a ghostly breath or two, and floating lightforms. Beyond the (sometimes musical) tapping, the Battersea poltergeist started handwriting notes to the family, to psychical researchers and neighbours – even to British teen idols! This was a poltergeist with a particularly sassy personality – sometimes more than one, it seemed. Mostly he was known as 'Donald', a mischievous 15-year-old, the same age as Shirley in 1956. Donald shared her interests in dressing dolls, royalty, and the young actor Jeremy Spenser (who acted alongside Marilyn Monroe in 1957's *The Prince and the Showgirl*, and later in François Truffaut's film adaptation of Ray Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451*). In a surprise twist, Donald revealed that he was actually the dauphin (eldest son of Louis XVI) during the French Revolution, switched with another boy in his holding cell, successfully escaping imprisonment. In the following years, Donald presented details, including obscure ones that could be historically verified, of his past royal incarnation. The press at the time romanticised this story of a teenage girl and her spirit companion. This book shows that there was an undeniable spark to this unconventional relationship.

The ghostly personality disrupted lives of the working-class Hitchingses, attracting press, police, unwanted spectators, Spiritualist mediums, doctors, and paranormal investigators. Like most experients, the anxious Hitchings wanted their lives to return to normal, yet Donald settled in and essentially became a vital part of the family. The chief investigator was the fortean researcher Harold Chibbett (given an excellent overview by Bob Rickard in **FT310:50–51**). Chibbett ended up dedicating years of empathetic support to the Hitchingses ("a real gentleman and a dear friend", Shirley writes in the book's dedication). He actively engaged in historical sleuthing to test if 'Donald' was indeed the deceased dauphin Louis-Charles as he claimed. Also investigating at one point was Andrew Green (see Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch entry, 'Letters from a Poltergeist', **FT215:22**), who wrote about the case in *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973). Unlike Chibbett, who was increasingly convinced that a discarnate spirit was indeed haunting the Hitchingses, Green posited that Shirley herself was writing the notes in an altered state of consciousness. Now in her 70s, Shirley denies such allegations: Donald's notes appeared spontaneously.

James Clark competently pulls together the primary source materials collected by Shirley and her husband Derek from "an Aladdin's Cave of paranormal papers" in Chibbett's home after he died in 1978, stowed away in their attic until Clark interviewed her about the Battersea poltergeist for his book *Haunted Wandsworth* (2006). From that, this exceptional collaboration was born. Along with newspaper clippings, Shirley's father's diary, and other intriguing sources, *The Poltergeist Prince of London* fulfils Shirley's wish – and no doubt Donald and Chibbett's – to "put her full story on record, largely to redress the way she felt some authors had, over the years, misrepresented what had happened".

Chibbett had failed to get his own book on "The Prince of Shades" published, and Clark handles the controversial aspects of the case with self-reflexive finesse. With Shirley referred to in the third person throughout the text, Clark brings forth experiential, psychological, and hypothetical aspects in a way that Chibbett, being so closely implicated in the events, probably could not have. Clark sustains an analytical distance given the inconclusiveness of the phenomena themselves, but he is not shy to ask critical questions in the text, including of co-author Shirley's own motives. Having her, the main experient, at Clark's side brings a dimension to these events that otherwise is seldom found in evaluations of paranormal case studies, namely a story that respects those who encountered and lived with 'Donald' while illuminating the emotional and personal impact the phenomena had on them.

The Poltergeist Prince of London reveals a key intersection between psychology and spiritualism in mid-20th century psychical research that emerged on the cusp of psychokinetic concepts gaining wide attention. It is an essential read for any fortean, particularly those intrigued by mediumship, ghosts, archival adventures, and mid-century Britain.

Christopher Laursen

Fortean Times Verdict
A RIGHT ROYAL POLT REVEALED LIKE NEVER BEFORE **9**

The White Devil

The Werewolf In European Culture

Matthew Beresford

Reaktion Books Ltd 2013
Pb, 262pp, refs, bib, ind, £16.95, ISBN 9781780231884
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.25

The White Devil

It falls to the author of this overview of werewolf folklore from the Palæolithic to the 21st century to lead us through disparate sources. But after reading this meandering book, I was left with more questions than answers.

Why are burials with fox teeth included in a discussion of the significance of wolf teeth in Palæolithic burials, with no contrast drawn between them? Why are two dates quoted for the domestication of wolves as dogs? Why does the section on the manifestation of werewolves in Roman society not place the discussion in the context of Romulus and Remus?

The text is full of suppositions and poor correlations. Why does Beresford believe the warriors' boar-crested helmets on the Gundestrup cauldron represent Freyr, a god from a society at least six centuries after it was manufactured? Why does he think Bran, a god from a completely different pantheon, also ended up symbolised there?

The use of the term shaman, an Evenki word from Siberia, in relation to Corsican folk magic is frustrating, when Beresford has used the Corsican names *mazzeri* and *benandanti* for other practitioners. The worst supposition, however, is the link drawn between the significance of nine in Corsican folk magic and the nine notches on the base of the carved deer stag from Creswell Crags, with the implication of a continuity of belief over 13,000 years.

Beresford could possibly have rescued something with a decent conclusion, however the book just fizzles out.

Beresford has written a book that doesn't know what it's trying to say.

Steve Toase

Fortean Times Verdict
A CONFUSING MEANDER AROUND AN INTERESTING SUBJECT **5**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a selection of recent fortean books...

UFO Investigations Manual

Nigel Watson

Haynes Publshing 2013

Hb, 163pp, illus, refs, gloss, ind, £21.99, ISBN 9781780231877

It has been decades since we last saw serious and seriously hefty handbooks on investigating UFOs, but here the topic is brought up to date for a new generation.

Nigel Watson, a veteran of British UFO research and one of the field's most balanced writers, divides the large-format book into two parts. The first is a compact and well-illustrated romp through history, identifying the key cases, investigations and theories in each period. The second – the manual for would-be investigators – has been relegated to appendixes on how to produce a report, a good investigation 'kit', run a 'skywatch', and essential references. The production is superb and while most of this is old hat, it is packed with information and presented brilliantly. Watson's clear exposition illuminates a path between the equally blind pitfalls of credulity and rejection. A gift of this book would inspire a young ufologist in the best possible way.

Think

Guy P Harrison

Prometheus Books 2013

Pb, 214pp, bib, notes, $13.68, ISBN 9781616148072

Now, you too can "think like a scientist" – which here is synonymous with thinking like a sceptic. Presented as a guide to critical thinking, there is much sense for everyone, even forteans. But it comes from the Prometheus/CSICOP (now CSI) school of hard 'skepticism' and is not for pansy believers, as Harrison lays into almost everything tainted with the 'paranormal'. Nevertheless, we can endorse its mantra – "Think before you believe" – as being close to Fort's advice.

Wait! Does this mean believing is OK even for scientists as long as they've had a think first?

Stop Worrying! There Probably is an Afterlife

Greg Taylor

Daily Grail Publishing 2013

Pb, 269pp, notes, £16.99, ISBN 9780987422439

Yet another considered opinion on the eternal problem of 'life after death'. Taylor reviews a lot of the narratives and evidence from other sources, concentrating mainly on investigations by doctors and medics.

Some new researchers – like Anthony Peake – are noticeable by their absence. Well written and worth reading but, again, nothing new.

Real Encounters, Different Dimensiobs & Otherworldly Beings

Brad & Sherry Steiger

Visible Ink 2014

Pb, 383pp, $19.95, ISBN 9781578594559

These two veteran researchers of a wide variety of paranormal experiences once more produce an encyclopædic volume, this time thematically on anomalous experiences of other 'worlds' and 'entities', from the expected aliens and fairies to demons, totem animals, angels, spirits, poltergeists, disembodied voices and the sense of divine presence.

There is new material here as well as much that is familiar, but retold from the point of view of writers of considerable experience. This is particularly interesting when they illustrate with opinions gathered from their lifetime of chatting, interviewing or corresponding with many of the great names and top researchers from within science, on its fringes and further out.

A good fortean read.

On the Edge of Reality

Colin Andrews with Synthia Andrews

New Page Books 2013

Pb, 318pp, notes, index, $17.99, ISBN 9781601632555

Colin Andrews is known to *FT* readers through his early investigations and endorsements of UFOs and crop circle formations. Like the memoir by the Steigers (above), this one by Andrews and his wife Synthia, a naturopathic physician, is more of a re-evaluation of their investigations into various aspects of the paranormal over three or more decades.

Although their thesis concerns the changes in personal, social and global consciousness as reflected in anomalous phenomena and the way they are assimilated, again like the Steigers' book, it is their account of the people and events along the way that seems more interesting. Here, for example, is the full story of how Andrews withdrew from the crop circles arena after an intense encounter with Rob Irving at a conference in Helsinki in 1996 (which Irving covered for *FT*).

The Andrewses became more involved with research into 'global consciousness' and 'alien intelligence' and their interactions with the planetary environment.

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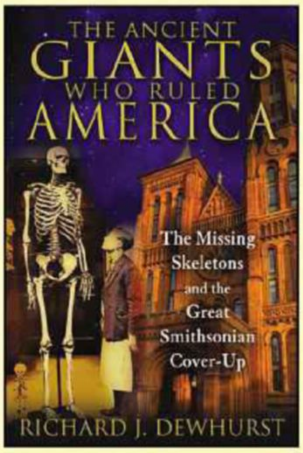
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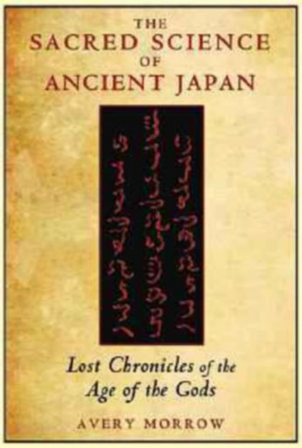
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Robocop

Dir José Padilha, US 2014

On UK release

Paul Verhoeven's dystopian 1987 movie *Robocop* had something to say. Its sardonic humour and pointed social commentary were a reflection of the excesses and ethos of the film's times; in a way, you could even argue that it was a precursor to the kind of satire Chris Morris brought to shows like *The Day Today*. But it was only thanks to a raft of cuts in the gore and sex scenes and the insertion of mock commercials that *Robocop* achieved its 'R' rating. Verhoeven subsequently commented that, ironically, the cuts actually increased the disturbing nature the film by reducing its satirical intent.

In 2014, Hollywood knows how to please a ratings board, and the new *Robocop* has moved from 'R' all the way down to a 12 rating. Attempting to satisfy everyone, this remake doesn't quite gel, unsure of what its message really is. This is despite a strong cast – including Gary Oldman in a very well fleshed out role – and a talented director (José Padilha) who is quite obviously as adept at storytelling as he is at action.

One early scene – a shoot-out in which robot drones in Afghanistan go ballistic in the middle of a news segment meant to show their dependability – manages to bring a touch of the cleverness of the 1980s original to the current climate. Likewise, the moment when Robocop, with a database of every known felon in his brain, steps onto his inaugural launch stage to scan the audience and starts identifying criminals, hints at how much fun this film could have been. But we get very little of Robocop's interactions with the society he is meant to protect, the film instead concentrating on his own human past and quest for revenge.

Having said that, the film often looks great. Smartly directed, its mixing of clever sci-fi with bouts of amusing social commentary and a pacey storyline (bar the listless ending) will no doubt appeal to a wide audience; but this more human Robocop has also morphed into a pretty traditional Hollywood film. The most obvious attempt to elicit the type of mordant wit the original excelled at – an overblown Samuel Jackson hosting a Fox News-style TV show – is sabotaged by the actor's exaggerated and largely unfunny delivery, and segments like this one sit somewhat uncomfortably in a film that tries to be all things to all people. Perversely, by allowing more of the man to be glimpsed in the cyborg, Padhila has unwittingly robbed the titular character of his appeal. Perhaps I just expected *Robocop* to surprise me the way the orginal film did. Instead, this is lean, clean and serviceable: just what you'd want from a machine, really.

Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict
VERHOEVEN'S CYBORG AS A HOLLYWOOD ROBOT REBOOT **6**

The Zero Theorem

Dir Terry Gilliam, US/Romania 2013

On UK release from 14 March

Five years after the fascinating, and occasionally frustrating, big baggy monster that was *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (and following a brilliant operatic interlude with *The Damnation of Faust* at ENO), Terry Gilliam returns to the big screen with a typically mind-bending tale full of visual invention and surreal humour. *The Zero Theorem* slips neatly into his existing oeuvre, combining the dystopian, Heath-Robinsonesque retro-futurism of *Brazil* and *Twelve Monkeys* with the thematic obsession with imagination and illusion of *Munchausen* and *Parnassus*. The surprise is that while this looks and feels like a Gilliam film – though one more modest in resources than we're used to – the screenplay is not Gilliam's own, but is by someone called Pat Rushin. It concerns Qohen Leth (Christoph Waltz), an alienated "entity cruncher" (it's like number crunching, but more complex) who lives in an abandoned church and waits for a mysterious phone call that will explain the purpose of his existence. Management – in the person of Matt Damon – decides to use his skills in proving the 'Zero Theorem' (that life is utterly meaningless), a job that has driven all previous crunchers insane – although Qohen (whose eccentricities include speaking in the first person plural and not eating foods with any flavour) is already pretty certifiable. He is helped or hindered in his quest by his frighteningy chirpy manager (David Thewliss), a virtual shrink (Tilda Swinton), a beautiful call girl (Mélanie Thierry) and Management's teenage son (Lucas Hedges), each of whom attempts, for his or her own reasons, to bring Qohen out of his shell.

There's a lot to think about here – more than can be mentioned in a brief review – and some flashes of typical Gilliam brilliance in the realisation of the film's world: talking adverts that follow you along the street, for example – but the film still sags in its central portion: the relationships it sets up are simply unable to sustain one's interest, even if Waltz's performance brings the isolated Qohen to satisfying life. In the end, this feels like *Brazil* on a budget, and distinctly minor Gilliam. I've a suspicion, though, that repeated viewings may tease more out of it than was possible first time around.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
BRAZIL ON A BUDGET, BUT STILL FULL OF INVENTION **7**

Frost

Dir Reynir Lyngdal, Iceland/Finland 2013

Entertainment One, £15.99 (DVD)

Blood Glacier

Dir Marvin Kren, Austria 2013

Studiocanal, £15.99 (DVD)

You wait years for a film about a team of European scientists doing research at a remote glacier only to unleash a terrifying menace, and then two come along at once.

Frost is set in a research station on the edge of the Arctic Circle, where photographer Gunnar has arrived to visit his fiancée Agla and shoot a documentary – thus motivating yet another 'found footage' movie, although none too convincingly. Everyone else in the camp disappears, the power fails and we have to get through the next hour or so in pitch darkness, with weird noises and flashing lights leading our increasingly distraught couple to go in search of whatever nameless horror is responsible. Trouble is, weird noises and flashing lights (and the usual shaky-cam tedium) is all director Reynir Lyngdal has to offer. The result is like *Blair Witch* on ice and best avoided.

Much better, at least in the small world of scary-things-happening-to-glacier-research-team movies is the German language *Blood Glacier* (aka 'The Station'), in which another scientific team investigating climate change at another remote spot, this time in the Alps, discover that a thawing glacier has released an icky red liquid and a bunch of deadly mutated creatures. To complicate matters, a government minister and her entourage are hiking up the mountain for a visit which could result in increased funding for the project; should the scientists warn her that there are giant flesh-eating dog-beetle hybrids on the loose? Luckily, she turns out to be a can-do, Angela Merkel type, and a bit of an asset in the ensuing monster battle. With an engaging ensemble and a fun script, this is a far better *Thing* knock-off than *Frost* and adds up to a hugely enjoyable B-movie eco-horror, perhaps best enjoyed with some *freunden* and a good bottle of *schnapps*.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

FEEBLE FOUND FOOTAGE FLICK LEAVES THIS REVIEWER COLD	3
AUSTRIAN B-MOVIE IS FUN ALPINE MONSTER MASH	7

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

FRANKENSTEIN: THE TRUE STORY

Dir Jack Smight, US 1973

Second Sight, £12.99 (DVD)

This might be billed as the 'True Story' of Frankenstein, but while admittedly more accurate than the Universal versions, it's still a general mash-up of Mary Shelley's classic novel with other material. Yet, with such rich source material, there's always fun to be had, and clocking in at three hours this offers a thoroughly welcome long-form version of the story.

We open with a young Victor Frankenstein (Leonard Whiting) stomping out of his brother's funeral arguing with his fiancée. He longs to create life; she tells him they will do just that, when they eventually have a baby. Victor rolls his eyes: "And so can animals. Life out of life, that's no miracle. But life out of death. Out of my brother's corpse…" Soon he meets with the eccentric Doctor Clerval (David McCallum) who happens to be carrying a severed arm around in his medical bag. Clearly on the same wavelength, the two build the obligatory grand laboratory and set about creating "liiiiife!"

What sets this version apart from most others is that when the creature (Michael Sarrazin) finally does rise up from its slab, it's nothing like the shambling flesh-robot of Karloff or Lee. Instead, this monster is handsome, healthy, kind and articulate. He even looks cool in a suit. Which makes it all the more tragic when things start going wrong. And it's here where the *Frankenstein* story gains its real heart-breaking power. Theories abound on the true theme of the tale. Is it about the danger of the God Complex, an allegory for homosexuality, a parable of class war – who knows? But, for me, Frankenstein has always been a tale of tragic, selfish rejection, in which a doctor, so passionate about creating life, quickly turns away from it when it 'displeases' him. Watch the Universal versions for that similar sense of tragedy. The creature didn't ask to be made, yet now he's seen as an abomination simply because he develops some facial disfigurement. No wonder he's driven to commit vile acts. For me, *Frankenstein* teaches us something pretty profound. Monsters really *are* made: but often it's simply by the way society treats them.

The mighty James Mason turns up as Dr Polidori, a riff on the quirky Dr Pretorious character from James Whale's masterpiece, *Bride of Frankenstein*. Mason brings some welcome, twinkle-eyed humour, with his boudoir-style lab and exotic Chinese assistants. And Jane Seymour has a blast playing the intriguing, subversive character Prima. It seems almost obligatory for 1970s TV horror to have moments that traumatised younger viewers. This one didn't disappoint, with a couple of sequences that might be tame by today's standards, but are rather freaky and unexpected. With a fantastically atmospheric score by jazz legend Gil Melle and some excellent acting, this is a recommended exploration of the Frankenstein myth; and as a powerful morality play tale about what happens when you treat people like dirt, it's as 'true' as any version out there.

Fortean Times Verdict

HARDLY FAITHFUL, BUT A TRULY POWERFUL TAKE ON THE STORY	8

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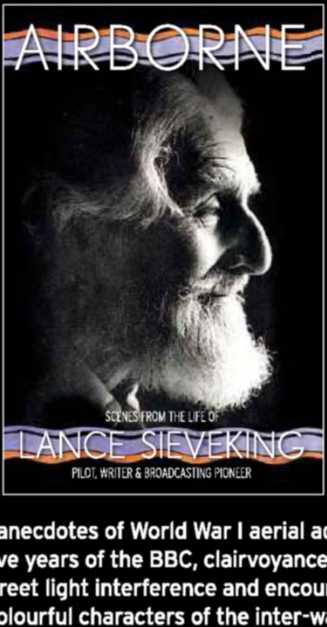

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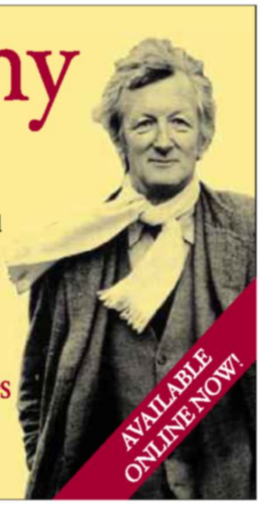

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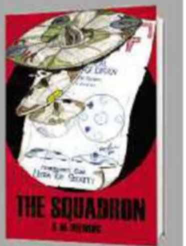

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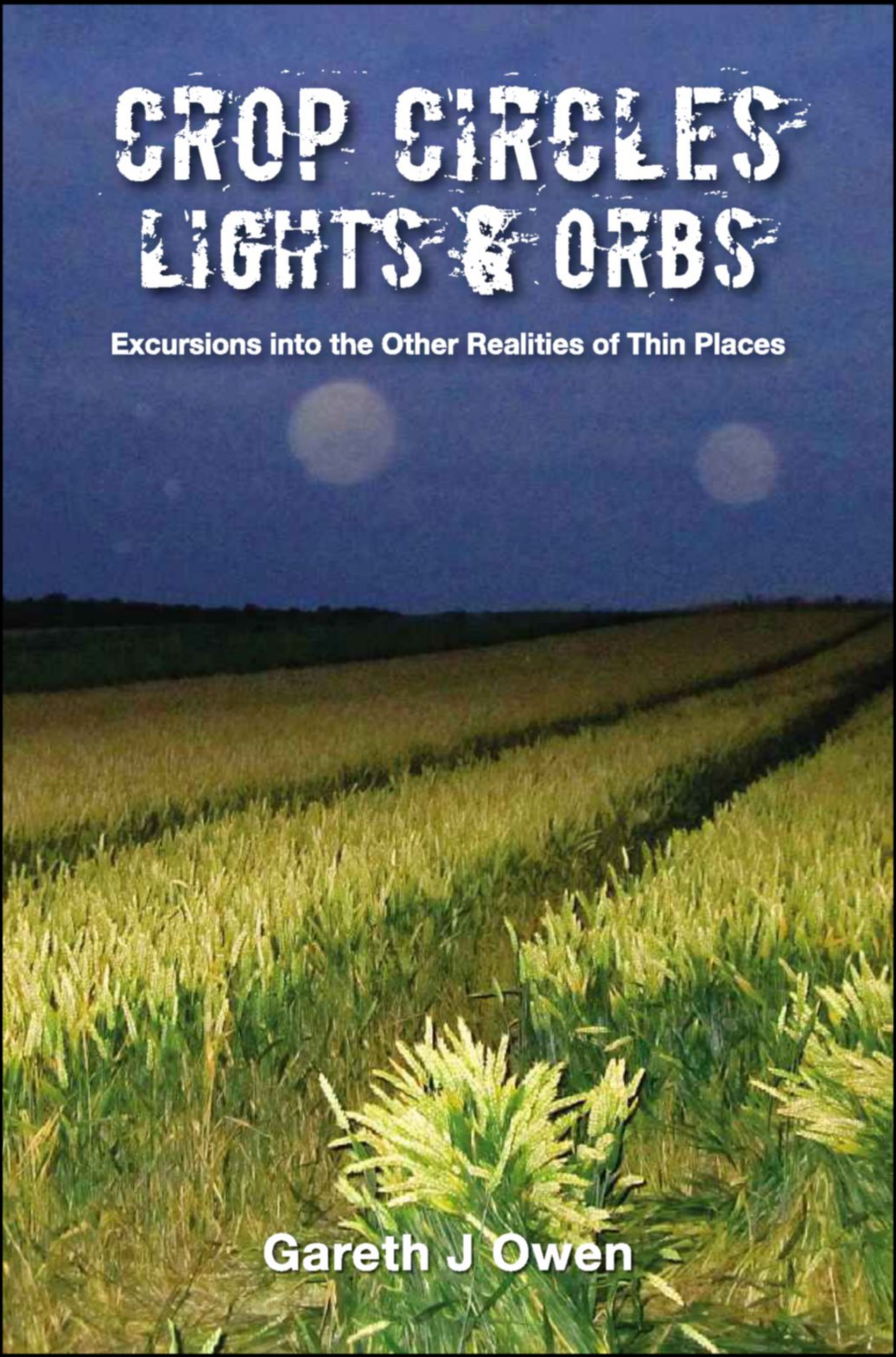
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Dear FT...

letters

Cut throat dell

Jacob Middleton's reference to macabre village place-name derivations [**FT**310:35, note 23] reminded me of the Hertfordshire countryside where I grew up. There were two Dead Woman's Lanes, one the site of a gypsy's murder near Preston and still believed to be haunted, the other near Anstey in the far north-east of the county. Field names also fall into this category: "Past tragedies are referred to in *Cut Throat Dell, Dead Horse Close, Dead Womans Field* and *Hill, Deadmans Field, Death Close*" (Grover, Mawer, Stenton: *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire*, 1938, p.263).

Not far from Anstey are a Cut Throat Lane and a Gallows Hill: might this remote area be fertile ground for a vaulting phantom? He wouldn't be the first Jack to haunt the Hertfordshire imagination: Jack O'Legs, the Weston giant, combined features of Robin Hood and Dick Turpin, and gave his name to a hill, B road and cave by the A1 near Graveley (Doris Jones-Baker: *The Folklore of Hertfordshire*, 1977, p.47f.)

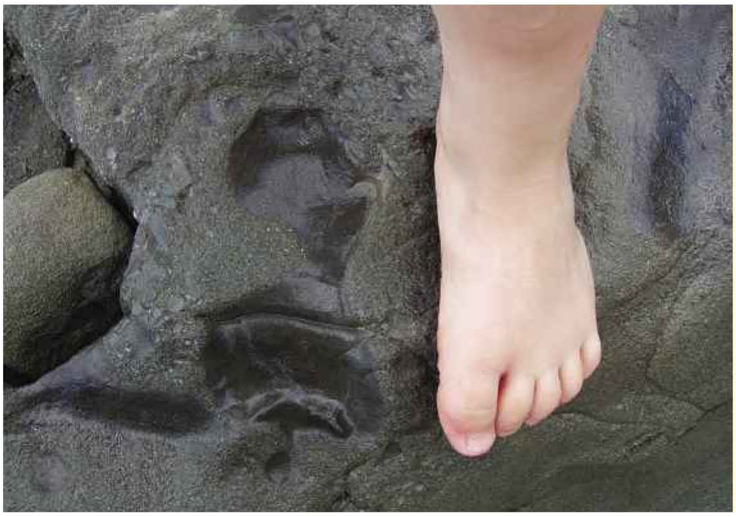
Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Colin Wilson and FT

I was interested in Gary Lachman's obituary for Colin Wilson [**FT**310:24-25]. Unfortunately, I didn't have a good relationship with Colin after I rejected an article he wrote for an early *FT* – I think it was in the early 1980s. It is a long time ago now, but I recall that I thought his treatment of Fort was fairly superficial. He probably had not fully thought through Fort's work and its influence, and seemed to lump Fort in with HP Lovecraft as typical of the period, treating HPL at greater length. Nothing he wrote about Fort and his approach to anomalies after that added anything more. Anyway, he never submitted anything more to *FT* during my tenure as editor and turned down requests. I think he felt I was hostile to him; which was far from the case as, like many others, I acknowledge his influence upon my youthful self.

I remember Colin speaking at Lionel Fanthorpe's birthday celebration. Seeing me in the audience a few rows back, just as I looked down at the schedule paper, he announced to the audience: "Ah, I see Bob Rickard has fallen asleep. He must find me so tedious."

Bob Rickard
London



Like a footprint

This photograph was taken in 2007 near Inverloch in Victoria, Australia, at a beach well known for its dinosaur fossils. It looks as though there is a human footprint embedded in the rock, complete with one toe print. The real foot is that of my son (aged four at the time), who was amazed to see his foot fit perfectly into the print.

Michelle Hardy
Yarra Junction, Victoria, Australia

Gary Lachman's tribute to Colin Wilson was excellent. Wilson was throughout his career subject to misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and ill-informed spite, often by those who've never had a thought in their heads about any of the deeper questions of life. Lachman has put the record straight.

MG Sherlock
Colwyn Bay, North Wales

Beer flood

The molasses floods in Brazil and Boston [**FT**311:5] remind me of the "London Beer Flood". This occurred on 16 October 1814 at the Meux and Company Brewery on Tottenham Court Road. A vat containing approximately 610,000 litres [134,000 gallons] of beer ruptured, which caused a domino effect, rupturing other similar vats in the building. In total approximately 1,470,000 litres [323,000 gallons] of beer flooded into the nearby streets. The brown wave is reported to have destroyed two homes and crumbled the wall of the Tavistock Arms Pub, trapping an employee in the rubble. Nearby George Street and New Street were also swamped, resulting in a mother and daughter being killed, and a wake being disrupted by an unexpected delivery of booze!

Paul "Tiny" Jackson
Wiltshire

Seeing double

Might I suggest that if Tovah Greene wants to see fewer 'doppelgängers' when photographing herself in the mirror indoors in low lighting [**FT**310:75] she should either use a flashgun, choose a more sensitive ASA/ISO setting, and/or select a faster shutter speed? If her camera is digital, a quick look at the EXIF properties of the image files would probably reveal an exposure time in excess of one second, which would more than account for her apparent self-haunting. It's not necessary to use fancy equipment, double exposure, Photoshop, or "similar forms of trickery" to produce results like this – the same outcome could be achieved on a 1930s Box Brownie.

Dave Trevor
By email

Crackers!

Over the last few years, my success rate in pulling Christmas crackers has been zero. It doesn't seem to matter what technique I try – where and how tightly I hold it, and how much pull I apply – I always end up toyless... For a variety of reasons, our family Christmases have morphed into small quiet affairs with just my wife and daughter, which suits us all; but a box of 12 crackers between three means that we have a lot more goes, so my lack of success has become apparent to my family. I'm stronger than both my wife and daughter and I wonder if it is my own strength that is somehow working against me. Are there any experts in cracker physics to suggest a possible explanation?

Clive Gee
By email

Nameless governess

I thoroughly enjoyed Roger Clarke's piece 'The house that was haunted to death' [**FT**309:28]. However, he is mistaken when he says "In *The Turn of the Screw*, a governess called Miss Giddens is sent to a large country house..."

In fact the governess is unnamed in James's story; she was given the name Giddens in Jack Clayton's much admired film version *The Innocents* (1961). Otherwise an excellent article!

Graham Mullins
Chislehurst, Kent

letters

Hinton Ampner

Roger Clarke's cover article ('The House that was Haunted to Death' – **FT309:28-32**) discusses ghostly activity that reportedly afflicted a house at Hinton Ampner, Hampshire, in the 18th century. This could be construed as having been a long-running and *genuine* haunting, but Clarke's principal interest is in whether the events inspired the writing of a *fictional* ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. Unfortunately, the article is somewhat misleading regarding the Hinton Ampner case.

"These days," writes Clarke, "Hinton Ampner is a National Trust property open to the general public, sold very much as a garden with a house attached"; but he's referring to what's known, more formally, as 'Hinton Ampner *House*', thereby failing to make clear that Hinton Ampner is the name of a hamlet, one that contains a church along with other properties. He also gives the impression that the allegedly haunted house stood on the site now occupied by Hinton Ampner House, which doesn't seem to be the case.

The late Harry Price included a chapter on the haunting in his *Poltergeist over England* (1945). In a footnote, he mentioned a letter from a Mr CJP Cave, who claimed that curious and unexplained noises used to be heard in the new house, mainly just before dawn. However, in the same footnote, Price stated: "The new house was built fifty yards [46m] from the old [allegedly haunted] site."

During one of my visits to the hamlet, I enquired about the location of the old house. I was shown a site not far from the church, and roughly 246ft (75m) NNE of the present-day Hinton Ampner House (see photograph below).

Dr PA McCue
By email

PA MCCUE

Hopkinsville invaded

Forteans will remember Hopkinsville, Kentucky, as the site of one of the most publicised UFO/alien encounters in paranormal history when in 1955 a farm family spent the better part of a night fending off an invasion of little green aliens with big ears. Last year, the town was invaded by millions of blackbirds and European starlings for the second time since the late 1970s, blackening the sky and "fouling the landscape, scaring pets and raising the risk for disease" [Reuters, 21 Feb 2013]. The inhabitants had to dodge bird poop in a scenario reminiscent of Hitchcock's 1963 thriller, *The Birds*. The coincidence of two avian onslaughts on this town following the 1955 paranormal occurrence titillates this fortean more than taking an aphrodisiac while looking at a photo of Diana Dors!

• In his book *Where Bigfoot Walks*, ecologist Robert Pyle wrote that the late Dian 'Gorillas in the Mist' Fossey claimed gorillas eat their own fæces – and, to a lesser extent, that of other gorillas. This coprophagy is believed to have possible dietary functions by allowing vitamin B-12 – which is synthesised in the hindgut – to be assimilated in the foregut. This simian scatological surprise is thought to explain why cryptozoologists never find Bigfoot dung. Fossey stated that the eating of excrement occurs among most vertebrates, including humans, who have nutritional deficiencies.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Time and space

Steve Moore's forum article 'Time, Space and Blavatsky' [**FT310:53-54**], omitted the third, most logical and arguably the most important, view of time: it's an illusion.

Time has no properties of its own, like matter or energy; just those arbitrarily assigned to it by theorists. It therefore doesn't exist as an entity in its own right. It's an abstract, man-made concept derived from natural astronomical and atomic cycles from the Earth's rotation (day) and orbit (year), to the frequency of the radiation emitted by the outer electrons of caesium-133 atoms in atomic clocks during transition cycles (9,192,631,770 of which define one second).

Once any of those natural cycles has occurred, it can't be experienced again. Neither can we experience now any cycle that's due to occur in the future. There is no 'universal master clock', either. Natural cycles can vary, depending on their environment. Even our personal impression of the rate at which time passes can vary, depending on what we're doing or thinking about.

However much we manipulate the clocks use for timekeeping, or inflict extreme temperature variations, high speeds or strong fields on them, we cannot pause, rewind, or fast forward every natural cycle in the Universe at the same instant. Therefore we cannot manipulate time itself – or 'travel' in time. Putting a watch forward by several hours does not take it, or the wearer, several hours into the future.

The past can only be revisited via memory; not just our own but also those of various materials which retain imprints of previous events. Future events can be predicted; but only if every condition likely to affect the outcome is already set in motion. For example, the trajectory of a bullet can only be predicted exactly if it's not affected by a sudden gust of wind. Another example is the way we compare the relative speeds and directions of vehicles to predict whether it's likely to be safe for us to cross a road.

And, since time does not exist, the Minkowsky-Einstein '4-dimensional time-space continuum' cannot exist, either. We should revert to one of the earliest definitions of space as the infinitely vast, characterless, shapeless, timeless and dimensionless 'nothing' in which all the detectable (and dark) matter and energy of the cosmos exists.

Ian Machell
Staverton, Wiltshire

Body disposal

I am writing in response to Mat Coward's enquiry as to whether quicklime is suitable for the disposal of a body [Mythchaser, **FT305:23**]. It is not. Quicklime is calcium oxide (CaO). This is a very caustic substance, but is also very hygroscopic, i.e. it enthusiastically seizes water from the surrounding environment. This is because the oxide reacts with water molecules to form calcium hydroxide ($Ca(OH)_2$). Hydroxides will react with and so dissolve organic matter – indeed, I am aware of unconfirmed reports of sodium hydroxide ('caustic soda') being used to dispose of bodies.

The use of sodium hydroxide is perfectly feasible, because it dissolves in water. Calcium hydroxide does not. Whereas sodium hydroxide can effectively infiltrate the body, which after all is mostly water, calcium hydroxide cannot. When the body comes into contact with the quicklime, the moisture at the lime-skin interface will react to form calcium hydroxide. This will begin to attack the organic (fat and protein) content of the skin, but because it won't dissolve in the aqueous tissues, further ingress into the body will be incredibly slow. Assuming the point of this exercise to be the rapid disposal of evidence, I'd say that was a showstopper. Bacteria on the surface of the skin would be destroyed, further reducing decomposition (although the internal digestive flora would be unaffected and would continue to go about their merry business of devouring their former host from the inside).

Additionally, while caustic substances destroy soft tissue, they have little effect on minerals. Bones are largely made of calcium phosphate, which would not be affected by the lime, although if the latter did eventually succeed in destroying the bone's soft tissue components the remaining phosphate would be brittle enough to be ground up fairly easily.

I suspect the idea that quicklime can dissolve bodies may be the result of confusion with the limekiln itself. A limekiln is used to make quicklime by taking a source of calcium carbonate and heating it up until it undergoes thermal decomposition. Both calcium carbonate and calcium phosphate could be converted into calcium oxide at the temperatures at which a kiln operates, so throwing bones into it would be an efficient (and indeed useful) way to dispose of them. Given that limekilns operate at about 1,000 degrees C, a whole corpse could be disposed of in the same way because the soft tissue would burn and boil away. Even the dental fillings and gallstones left after John George Haigh's acid bath murders would be destroyed under these conditions.

Ian I'Anson MRSC
By email

I always thought quicklime was used to hide the odour of the decaying body to stop it being discovered by the smell; presumably the body had been well hidden and time should not be a factor in how long it takes to fully decompose.

Chris Abrahams
Exeter, Devon

Harold Chibbett

It was wonderful to see Harold ('Hal') Chibbett featured in an article by Bob Rickard [**FT310:50-51**]. Chibbett's name isn't one that springs to most people's minds when they think of fortean research but it's one I have become very familiar with over the last few years. In 1956 (long before I was born) Chibbett visited the home of the Hitchings family in Wycliffe Road, Battersea, south London, after news reports had told of an apparent poltergeist troubling the family. He was far from the only person to show an interest in those events, but it was Chibbett who would come to work most closely with the Hitchings family in an attempt to understand what was really going on.

Chibbett spent years investigating and documenting those events and his records formed part of the archive Rickard refers to in his article. Sadly, I have to report that most of his archive was lost after his death. He died in 1978, followed some 16 years later by his wife Lily, and his surviving relatives did not see the value of his archive. However, Chibbett had always promised Shirley Hitchings – the 'focus' of the Wycliffe Road poltergeist – that she would inherit the records relating to her own story and so Chibbett's relatives told Shirley she could take whatever material she wanted before everything went to the rubbish tip. Shirley and her husband Derek hurried from their home in the south of England to Chibbett's house in north London where they discovered that the process of discarding material had already begun. They would have no time for a return trip and the collection was too vast for them to take everything and so they searched for material relating to Shirley and rescued as much of that as they could. Everything else was, presumably, later thrown away.

I came into the story in the late 2000s when I started to work with Shirley on a book telling the story of the Wycliffe Road poltergeist. By that time, the papers Shirley had rescued from Chibbett's archive had spent over a decade gathering dust in her attic and one of my first tasks was to sort hundreds of dog-eared and scattered documents into some sort of order. It took many weeks but it was well worthwhile because without those records our resulting book would have lacked much of its detail. It was published as *The Poltergeist Prince of London* in October 2013 by The History Press. (Further details are available at my website: www.james-clark.co.uk) Shirley remembers the man she knew as 'Chib' with great fondness and that is why she dedicated our book to his memory.

For my part, as I became familiar with Chibbett's thinking as documented in his surviving papers, I came to think of him as an early fortean who I am certain would have greatly enjoyed reading *FT*. I was, therefore, delighted to see him recognised in your pages.

James Clark
By email

Cable knots

Rob Gandy asks if a similar phenomenon to Prof Mike Henderson's knotted scintillation counter's cable has been witnessed [**FT307:67**]. I remembered that when I was a kid I was fascinated by the tale of a warship that had weighed anchor only to find a knot in the anchor chain. I must have read it in one of the 'true mystery' books I devoured as a junior fortean. A search of the Internet revealed the following:

"A Harborside Mystery, January 26, 1947. Terminal Island. Grizzled mariners are baffled by the mysterious development of a perfect lover's knot in the anchor chain of the Navy oiler *U.S.S. Caliente*. When anchor was dropped in 9 fathoms of water, the chain hung perfectly straight – but when they went to move her into dry dock, the knot made it impossible to weigh anchor. Sailors cut the knot with torches and moved the ship on her way. The mermaids giggled, and the gremlins guffawed." (www.7daysinla.com/harborside-mystery)

Using Google News Archive, I also found this from the *News Sentinel* (Lodi, California), 13 Feb 1951: "NEW YORK Feb 12th – (UP) – The Barnegat Lightship was back on its proper station today with the crew trying to unravel a new mystery of the deep. A storm blew the ship off station recently and steps were taken immediately to weigh anchor and return the ship to its charted position. The project went well, and all but a hundred feet [30m] of anchor chain had been hauled in when work stopped abruptly and the bushy eyebrows of the sailors rose. 'There,' the Coast Guard announced today, 'in the middle of the huge chain, a hundred feet in from the mammoth mushroom anchor, was a perfect overhand knot.' The anchor chain is almost 12 inches [30cm] thick, the anchor weighs about one ton, and there is no way to tie an overhand knot without using the end of the material the knot is tied in, the Coast Guard said. The puzzled skipper of his ship reported his plight and the buoy tender Sassafras, working delicately with its 20-ton crane, untied the knot. 'Loneliness notwithstanding,' the Coast Guard announcement said, 'life isn't always static aboard the many lightships guarding offshore danger spots'."

The Barnegat Lightship also gets a mention on the website 'Lighthouse friends': "The story is told of how one lightship while riding out a hurricane at Winter Quarter in large and deep seas actually tossed a loop in its anchor chain and passed through the loop forming an overhand knot. The lightship was then unable to weigh anchor and had to slip the anchor chain – at least this is the story that the commanding officer told for how an overhand knot ended up in the anchor chain." (www.lighthouse-friends.com/light.asp?ID=658)

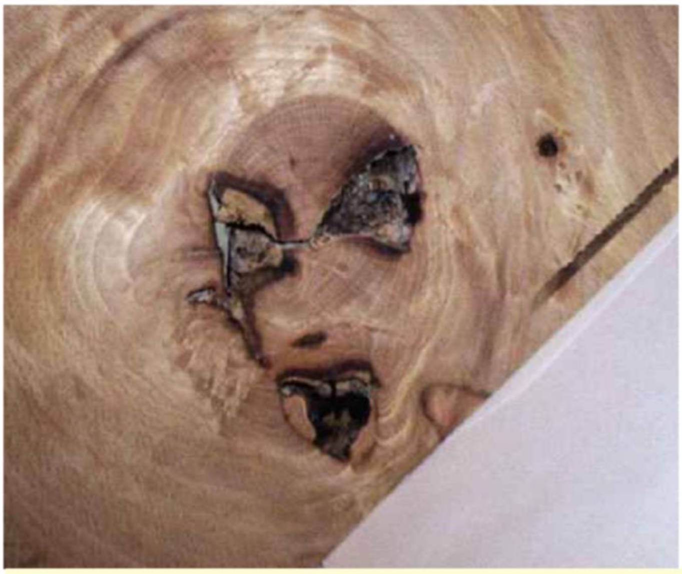
Personally, I go with the playful King Neptune theory.

Gareth Dobson
London

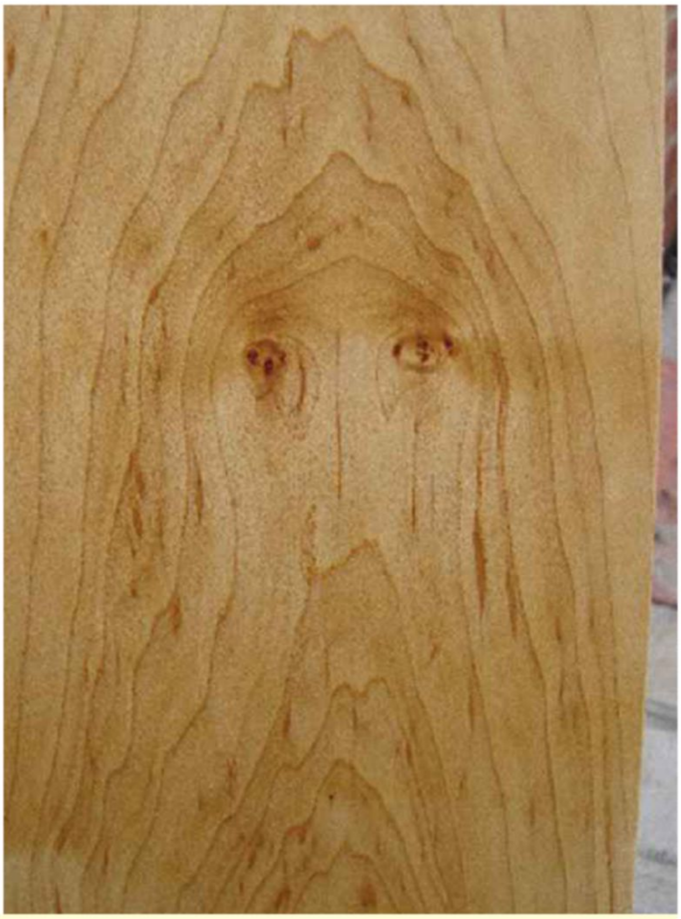
"It's not as good as last year"

TONY HUSBAND

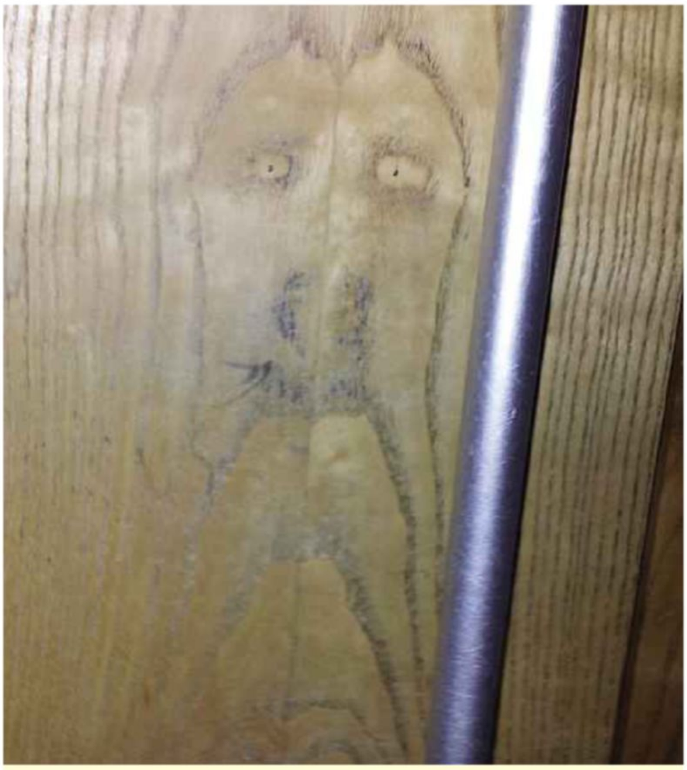
simulacra corner



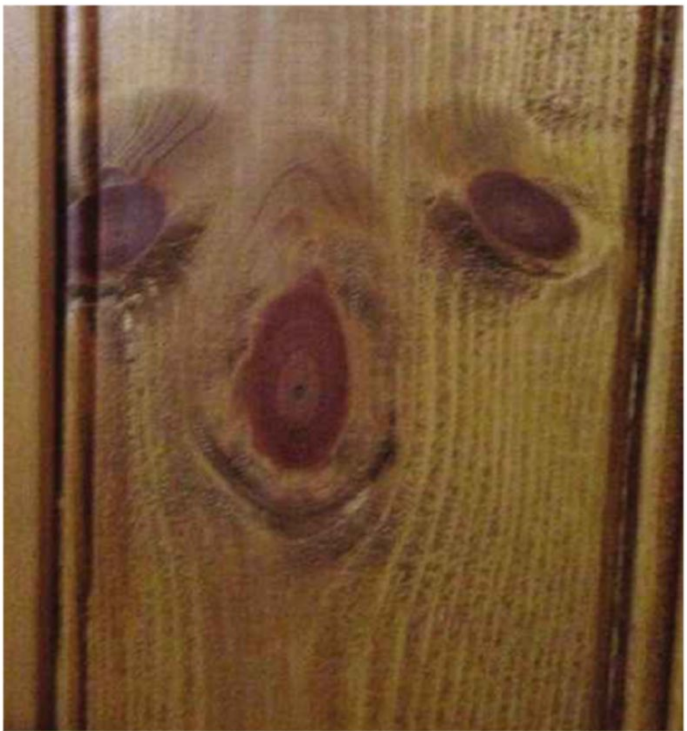
Pete Buttery noticed a face in a piece of beech he was machining in his workshop in Cornwall, and thought it resembled an alien.



William Gilbert and his brother James were feeding a piece of maple wood through a belt sander at their furniture-making factory unit in Jarrow, Tyne & Wear, when they noticed this image, which they interpreted as the face of Jesus.



Carl Saville noticed a curious face on the door of the gents' toilet in the Glasgow branch of Ikea. "Not Jesus or the BVM," he writes; "maybe some kind of Swedish god?"



Mark Heslop spotted this jolly chap in the wood panelling of a restaurant in Worthing, West Sussex.

it happened to me

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Something orange

In 2001 I moved into a rented flat in Raynes Park, London, with my six-year-old son, whilst I got myself back on my feet after my divorce. Although we only lived there five months, a couple of strange things happened.

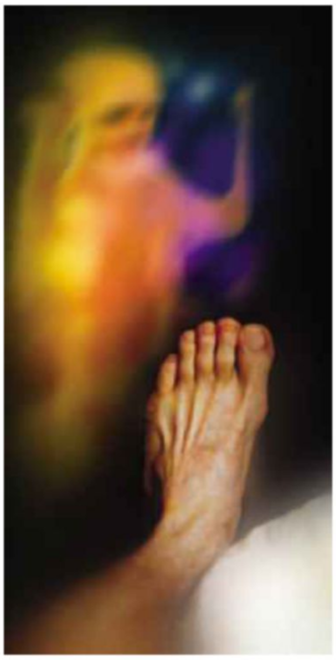
One evening we were in the lounge. My son had been a little naughty and I had told him off. He cried and came to give me a hug, and suddenly both my cats looked startled at something in the room and stood up. Their eyes both followed something slowly (invisible to me) around the room, and one cat looked at me terrified, and literally gulped, and then continued to follow whatever they saw intently for about 30 seconds, at one point looking right up and down at something. I was quite unnerved, and hugged my son tighter as I knew something was in the room with us.

Then a month or so later, I woke up in the middle of the night and in my sleepy state thought I saw in the darkness a short dark orange figure at the end of my bed, near my right foot. I did not have my contact lenses in so it was blurred and as I was sleepy I thought it must be my imagination; but at that moment my son, sharing my bedroom but in a bed the other end of the room, woke up and asked: "Mummy, what's that orange thing by your bed?" Realising it was not my imagination, and trying to be protective, I said, "Go back to sleep, you are just dreaming". Once he had turned over to go back to sleep, I kicked out hard at the orange being a couple of times, and it disappeared. When I questioned my son about it days later he still remembered it very clearly.

Julie Hilton
West Yorkshire

Toads and jelly

I read the news of a 'toad rain' in Cambridge and 'star rot' in Somerset [**FT309:18-19**] with great interest, as I believe I have been witness to similar events. The report describes the sudden appearance of countless tiny baby toads carpeting an area, although no one witnessed the supposed fall.



As a youth I walked through a nature reserve almost daily and at all times of the year on my way to play golf at our nearest course. At a certain time of the year (I forget exactly when, but during the warmer months) I remember a particular stretch of the path and the surrounding area similarly carpeted with baby amphibians, to the extent that it was virtually impossible to avoid crushing hundreds of the poor creatures underfoot. This event happened every year and, if I remember correctly, only lasted a day or two. I recall it clearly as I found the 'frog massacre' I was forced to commit to get past somewhat harrowing. I never thought, however, that this was an extraordinary event, because that stretch of path was right next to a large pond that I knew the creatures inhabited.

I assumed that it was the result of mass hatchings, with the baby frogs (or toads) somehow naturally being compelled to head out en masse with the aim of finding their own, less crowded, puddles or ponds. As an avid reader of your magazine for decades, I realise there can be no single catch-all explanation for such events. However, the Cambridge toad fall seemed so similar to my own experiences I would suggest that in that particular instance my disappointingly prosaic hypothesis remains the most likely explanation.

As for the star rot, I remember one year passing a similar single clump of gelatinous material, about 30-40cm (12-16in) across. It was on the same path through the nature reserve, but at a point at least a mile from the pond and where I had never witnessed any noticeable frog activity. The 'blob' persisted for a number of weeks, despite rain and everything else a British autumn could throw at it, and looked very similar to the photograph accompanying your recent article. I was familiar with frogspawn and I knew this was not the same stuff.

I was in my very early teens at the time and I remember asking my father what it was when he accompanied me on one occasion. I remember him somewhat sheepishly trying to explain to his innocent son that he believed it was something that had "come out when horses were having sex". I wasn't entirely convinced at the time, but the idea was enough to prevent me from touching it and I limited myself to occasionally poking it with a stick when I passed it. I am still intrigued as to what it was to this day.

Scott Wilson
Glasgow, Scotland

Wrong number

In the late Seventies/early Eighties I studied for a Master's Degree in Musicology, which I eventually abandoned to pursue a career in computers. Around 1982 I was supporting myself working as a music copyist. One of my clients was Arne Nordheim, Norway's most prominent 20th century composer and a huge celebrity at home. He once dropped in to see me and my landlady almost fainted – it would be like seeing Russell Brand or Chris Evans on your doorstep today.

Many years later, in 2003, a jazz band I played with for many years held a reunion. On the very same day, Arne Nordheim called me on my mobile, but he didn't get through and left a message which I've forgotten, but which obviously concerned somebody else. Bear in mind that I hadn't seen him for nearly 20 years; he had probably forgotten that I existed; and I didn't get that mobile number until 1997 anyway. So it was clearly a wrong number.

Later the same evening, I met one of my old bandmates, who had left the band around 1980 and whom I hadn't seen since. And of course he said... "Somebody told me you'd been working with Arne Nordheim – did you really?"

The band I played in never amounted to much. The only member who went on to make a name for himself was Rolf Wallin, who already at that time was far ahead of the others as a musician and composer. He is now regarded as Norway's foremost modern composer – which is interesting when you realise that he stepped into Arne Nordheim's shoes, so to speak. Incidentally, having reached such an exalted status he was the only one who didn't show up at the reunion, but such is life. I don't blame him.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Darren duplicated

When I was 15-16, I often used to hang out with my friends in our local neighbourhood. There was John, Neil, and Neil's elder brother Darren. One particular evening, there were just three of us – Neil said Darren was out on his motorbike. At one point, Neil said he needed to go home for something and went into his house, while John and I sat outside on the front garden wall awaiting his return. Neil came to the front room window and waved and from behind we saw Darren's head rise up, turn towards us and give us a broad grin. When Neil came out, we queried his story about Darren being out on his motorbike; he said that was indeed the case and that he had been alone in the room. Our initial thoughts were that this was some kind of portent and we nervously awaited Darren's return. We were relieved when he turned up unharmed. We were never able to explain why John and I had seen him grin at us from the front room.

Paul Gelderd
West Yorkshire

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

88. Wieliczka Salt Mine, Poland

ANDREW MAY enters a bizarre underground kingdom in search of a unique collection of sculptures – all of them carved from natural rock salt

Today there are a thousand-odd UNESCO World Heritage Sites – but in 1978, when the list was started, there were just 12. So it's something of a surprise that two of these original sites are little more than 10 kilometres (6 miles) apart. One is the historic centre of Kraków, which was one of the wealthiest cities of mediæval Europe; the other is the huge salt mine at Wieliczka. The proximity of the two is no coincidence. The mine, which was originally owned by the Dukes of Kraków, was one of the main sources of the city's fortune.

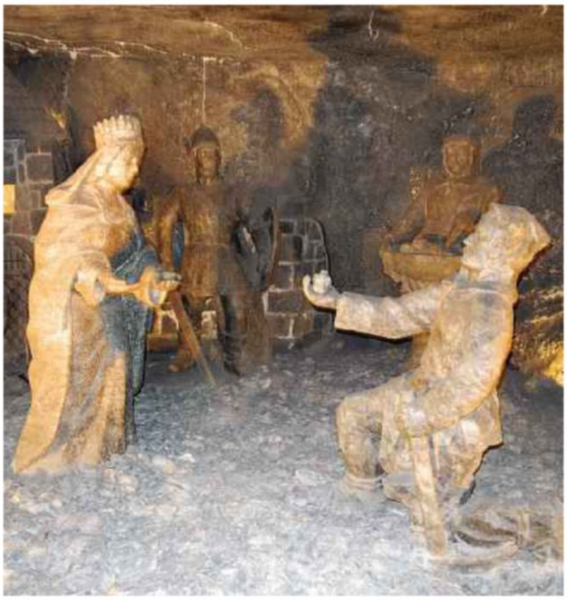
Salt, in the Middle Ages, was the most widely used food preservative. This made it a valuable commodity, and salt mines were as important to the economy as oilfields are today. By the middle of the 14th century the Dukes of Kraków had expanded their power-base to become fully-fledged Kings of Poland, and Wieliczka and its sister mine at Bochnia became the Royal Salt Mines. Between them they accounted for almost a third of the state treasury income. The organisation that ran the mines, Zupy Krakowskie (Salt Mines of Kraków), was one of the first large-scale industrial companies in the world, and almost certainly the first in which the workers had modern-style terms and conditions. In 1368 a statute was issued by Casimir the Great, one of Poland's most enlightened kings, setting out the management's obligations to their employees – including the rights of miners to a percentage of the salt they extracted.

By the end of the 18th century, Zupy Krakowskie had become the largest industrial centre in Europe, both in terms of production volume and the number of employees. Around this time, with the various partitions of Poland, the Polish monarchy ceased to exist – but Zupy Krakowskie carried on. It survived under Austrian rule in the 19th century, under the Second Polish Republic in the first half of the 20th century, and under communism in the later 20th century. It was only at the start of the present century that regular mining ceased and Wieliczka became a full-time tourist attraction.

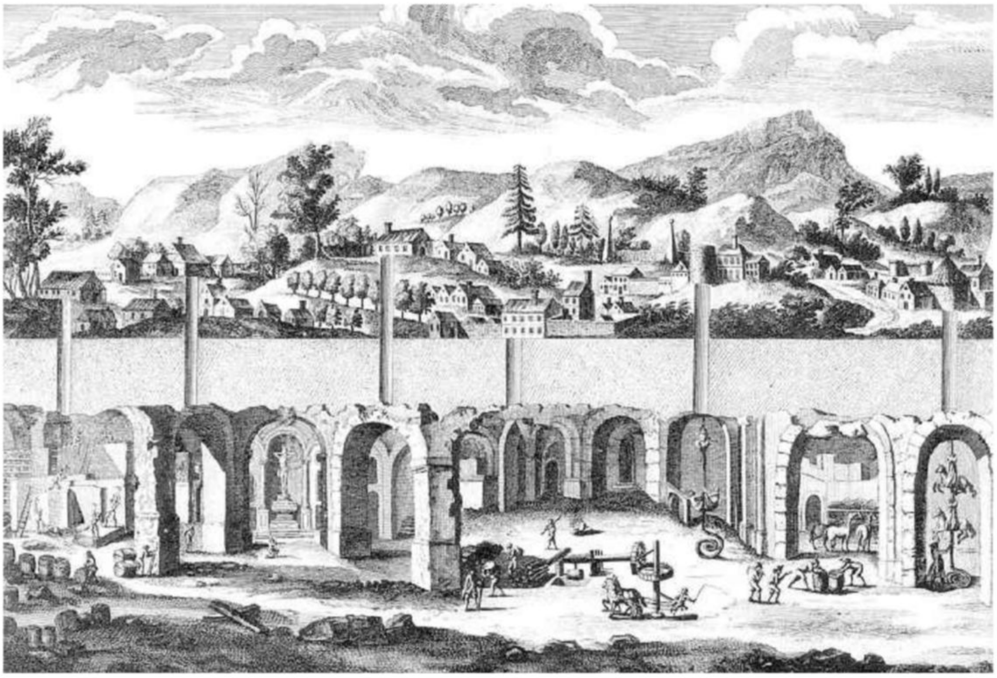
With its vast scale and stunning displays of subterranean engineering, Wieliczka is one of the great man-made wonders of the world. None of the sources I've consulted seem to agree on the exact figures, but even the most conservative speak of more than 200 kilometres (120 miles) of tunnels, linking at least 2,000 artificial caverns or "chambers" carved out of the salt deposits. Many of the chambers are huge, and some have been partially flooded to create artificial underground lakes. The mine is split into nine levels, the deepest of which lies 327 metres (1,060ft) below the surface.

Not surprisingly, the mine workings closest to the surface tend to be the oldest, while the deeper and more remote sections are more recent. After more than 750 years of continuous use, this makes the mine almost like a walk-through time capsule. The salt-laden atmosphere acts as a natural preservative, and in many chambers centuries-old timber props and beams are still in place, looking not much the worse for wear than the day they were installed.

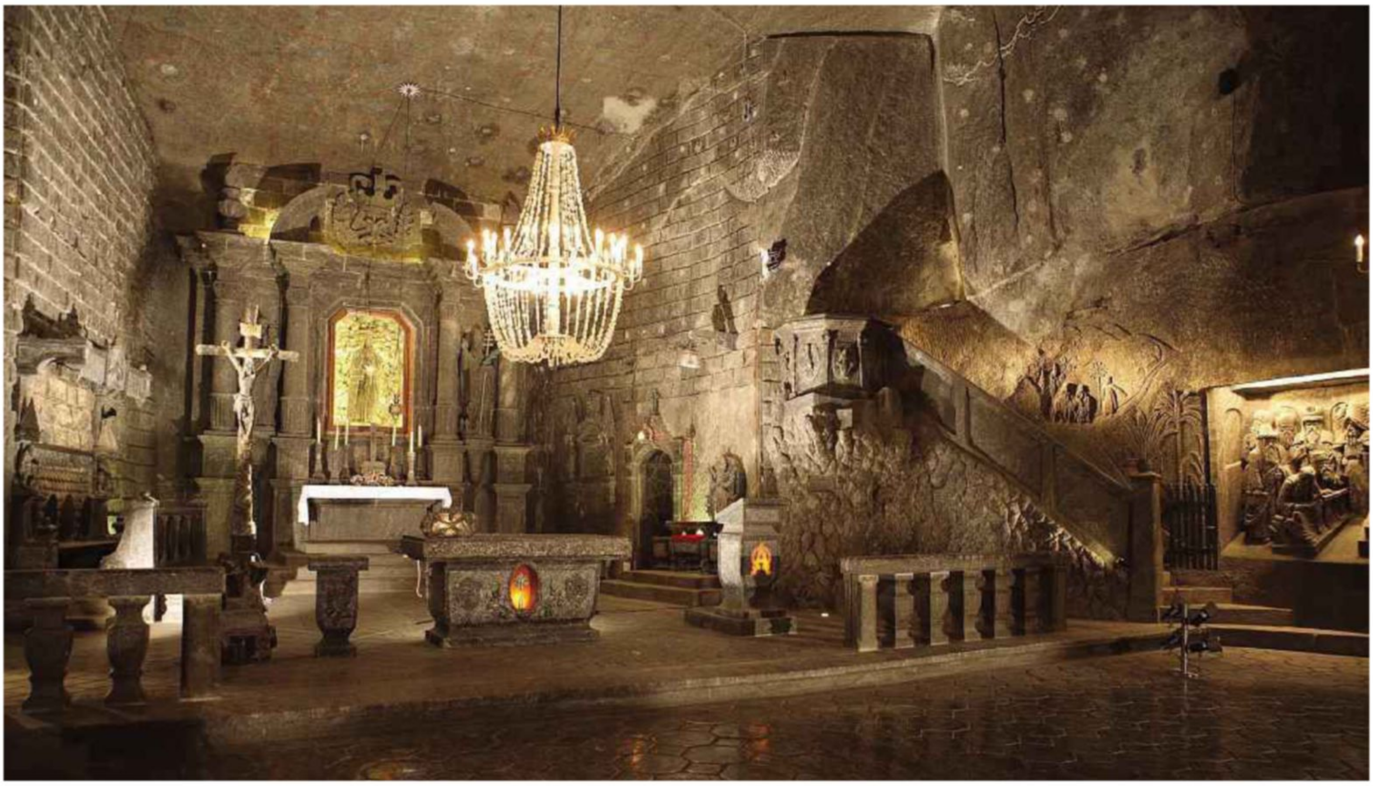
The mine has attracted inquisitive sightseers for centuries, including its fair share of famous visitors. Nicolaus Copernicus, the Polish astronomer who promoted the Sun-centred model of the Solar System, visited in 1493 when he was still a young student in Kraków. Almost 300 years later, in 1790, the mine received a visit by the great German polymath Johann Wolfgang



TOMASZ BABAROWSKI



TOP: A tableau carved in 1967 showing Saint Kinga, or Kunegunda, legendary founder of the mine.
ABOVE: A general view of the Wieliczka mine from an 18th century French encyclopedia.



"WIELICZKA" SALT MINE

von Goethe – apparently in one of his lesser-known roles as mining adviser to the Duke of Weimar. In 1971, when the mine was under communist control, it was visited by the outspokenly anti-communist bishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyła – the man who later became Pope John Paul II.

There is an oft-repeated anecdote to the effect that a seasoned French traveller of the 18th century remarked that Wieliczka was "no less magnificent" a sight than the Egyptian pyramids. Whether this is true or not, there's no doubt that Wieliczka quickly found its place on the tourist map, and by 1830 certain chambers had been specifically set aside as tourist attractions.

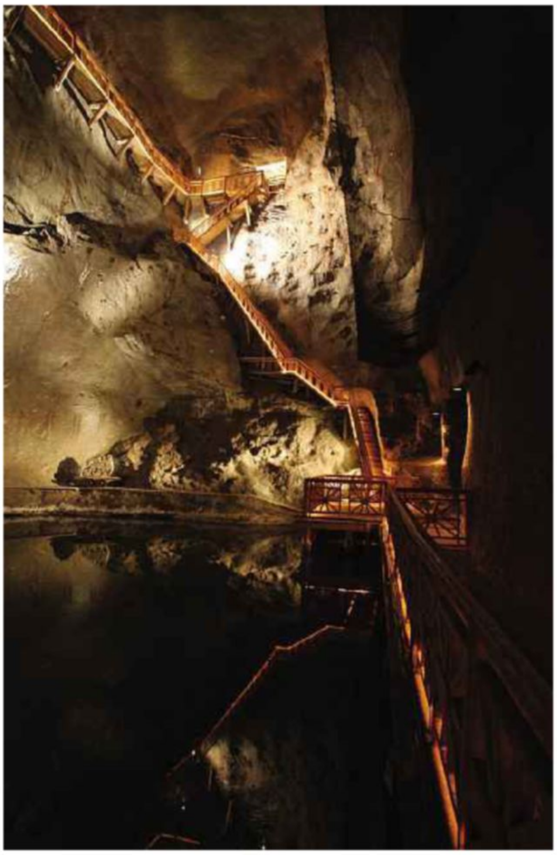
For present-day visitors the mine offers a selection of guided tours, of which the most popular is the "Tourist Route". That's the one I took. It covers a tiny fraction of the whole complex – less than three kilometres (two miles) of tunnels linking 22 cavern-like chambers on the uppermost three levels. But the tourist route offers something the rest of the mine doesn't – underground art. Each of the chambers along the route is decorated with statues, wall reliefs and other images carved out of the natural rock salt.

The earliest images are all religious in nature. Miners who spent a large proportion of their lives underground needed easily accessible places of worship, so they converted some of the disused chambers into chapels. Initially these were decorated with wooden altars and statues, but by the beginning of the 20th century the tradition of salt carving was firmly established. Most of the pieces on display – both religious and secular – date from the last 100 years. This was a critical period in the mine's history, during which its main source of revenue was shifting slowly but surely from salt extraction to tourism. There are statues of the Virgin Mary from pre-communist times, monuments to dour-faced workers from the communist period, and an ever-growing number of newer works, many of them depicting the history and folklore of the mine.

Chandeliers hanging from the ceiling are made from moulded salt

ABOVE: St Kinga's chapel; even the floor is carved from salt.

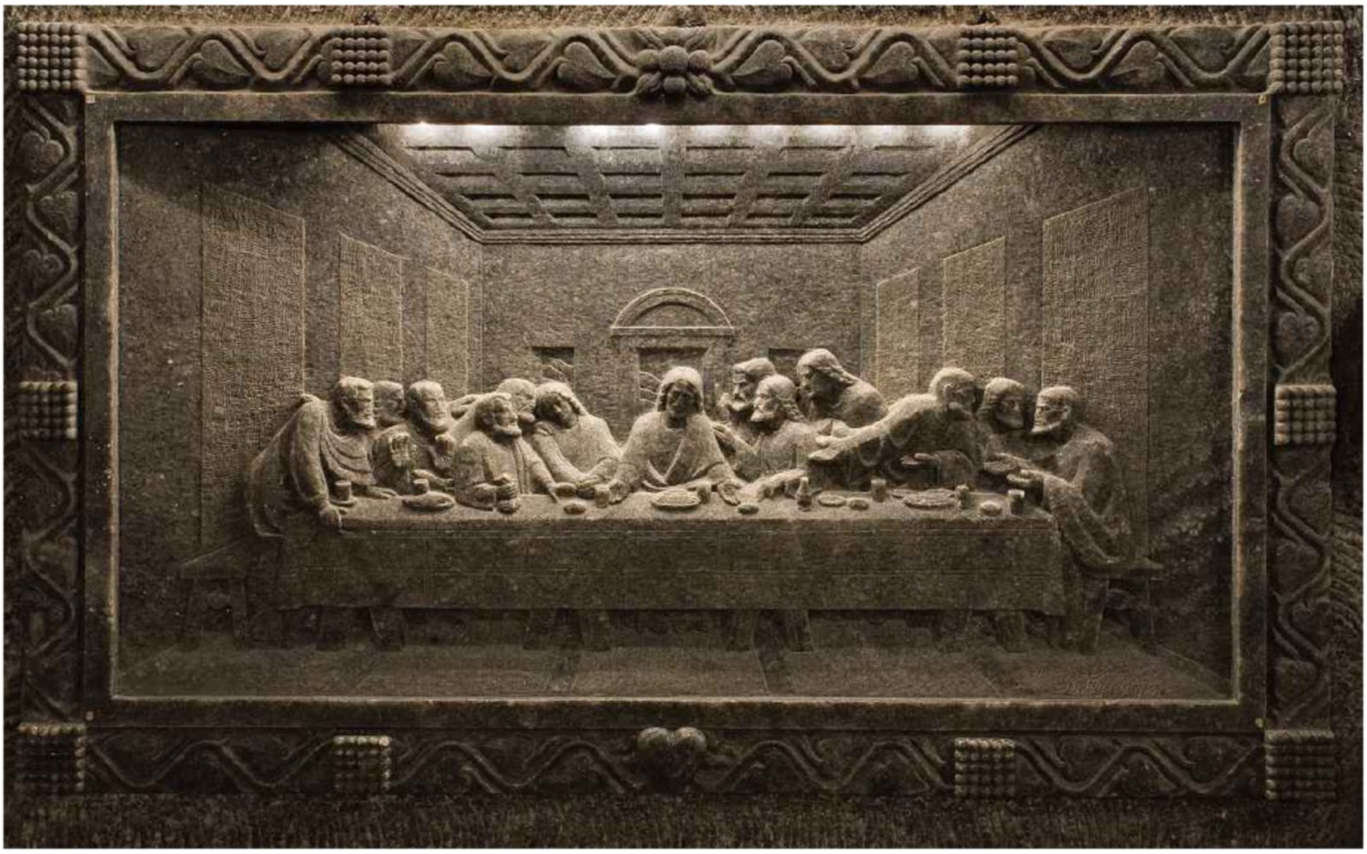
BELOW: A staircase leading down into the depths of the mine.



"WIELICZKA" SALT MINE

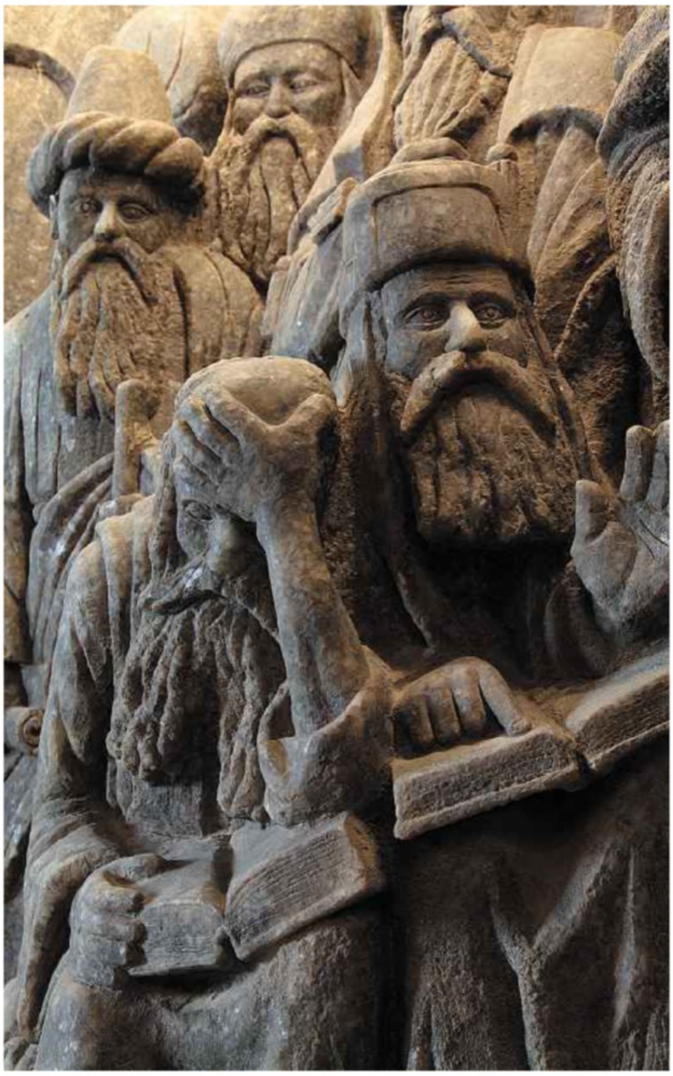
Perhaps the best known, and certainly the most photographed, of Wieliczka's many attractions is the chapel of Saint Kinga. This vast underground space is, according to my guidebook, 54 metres long, 15 metres wide and 12 metres high (175 × 48 × 39ft). There are half a dozen other chambers on the tourist route of a similar volume, but most of them are taller and narrower (perhaps a more sensible shape, when you think of the enormous weight the ceiling has to support). In contrast, St Kinga's chapel is much more like a conventional church in its dimensions. It's like a conventional church in its fittings, too – with an altar and a pulpit, statues in niches and biblical scenes on the walls... all of them carved out of salt. Even the perfectly level floor, which appears to be composed of neatly mortared ceramic tiles, turns out on closer inspection to be carved from the living rock. The chandeliers hanging from the ceiling are made from salt that has been specially moulded to give a glass-like appearance.

St Kinga's chapel was constructed over a period of more than 60 years, between 1896 and 1963. For the most part, the decorative carvings were produced by miners working in their spare time. One of the most accomplished of these was Antoni Wyrodek (1901-92), who was responsible for many of the intricately carved wall reliefs in St Kinga's chapel



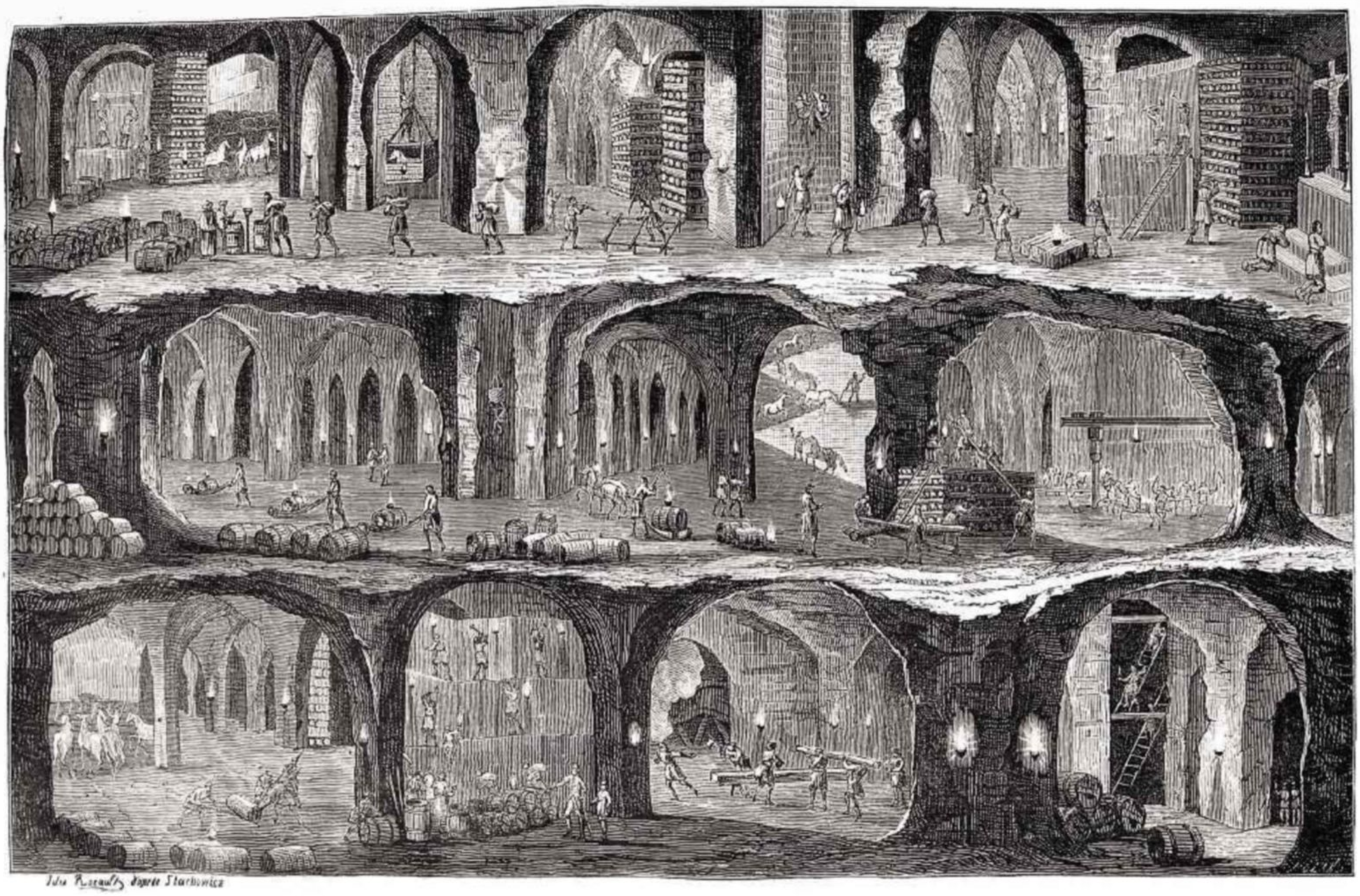
"WIELICZKA" SALT MINE

"WIELICZKA" SALT MINE



"WIELICZKA" SALT MINE

ABOVE: Artworks in the mine, all carved from salt, include a version of Leonardo's Last Supper and many chapels, altars and religious images.



ABOVE: A view of the underground workings at Wieliczka in a 19th century engraving. **BELOW:** Pope John Paul II's visit is immortalised in salt.

– including one modelled after that *Da Vinci Code* favourite, Leonardo's Last Supper. Wyrodek's earliest pieces were produced when he was a young miner, but he went on to study at art college and became a professional sculptor.

At this point you may be wondering just who Saint Kinga was, and what on earth she did to deserve such an extravagant display of underground devotion. The answer is simple: Kinga was the legendary founder of the Wieliczka mine. The daughter of the King of Hungary, she was betrothed to the Duke of Kraków. As a wedding gift, her father gave her a salt mine – but as this was in Hungary it wasn't going to be much use to her in Poland. So she took off her engagement ring, flung it into the mine, and prayed for the whole thing to be teleported to the vicinity of Kraków. Days later, as she was approaching that city, she stopped at Wieliczka and instructed her retainers to dig in the ground. They found the salt mine; and her engagement ring!

Kinga, also known as Kunegunda, was a real person who lived from 1224 to 1292. She really was the daughter of King Béla IV of Hungary, and she really did marry Duke Bolesław the Chaste (although the marriage was never consummated – the clue is in his name). And it's true that the first large-scale mining at Wieliczka took place during Kinga's lifetime. But there was no need for her to "discover" the mine, since the presence of salt deposits in the area, attested by numerous salt springs, had been known for millennia. In real life Kinga was a devoutly religious person who, after her husband's death, sold all her material possessions and spent her latter years in the convent at Stary Sacz. That's where she was buried, and where her relics remained for the next seven centuries. Then in 1994 her remains were reinterred in St Kinga's Chapel in Wieliczka – a place she was connected to only through a rather far-fetched legend! There are numerous other legends connected to the salt mine, many of them involving gnomes and spirits that are said to haunt the tunnels. The most powerful of these supernatural entities is the Skarbnik (variously translated as "Treasurer" or "Warden")... a fearsome spirit that is said to guard the mine's treasures. Visitors encounter a statue of the Skarbnik – carved from salt, of course – at the very end of the tourist route, 135 metres (440ft) below ground level.

GETTY IMAGES

UK residents should have no difficulty visiting the mine in person. There are plenty of cheap flights to Kraków, and frequent buses from Kraków to Wieliczka. The mine is open all year round, and guided tours in English are on offer several times a day.

The official website (in English) www.wieliczka-saltmine.com/ provides full information for visitors.

ANDREW MAY is a former scientist and FT regular with a lifelong interest in pulp fiction and weird stuff. He blogs at forteana-blog.blogspot.co.uk/

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28. THE MANCHESTER GHOST OF 1869

In May and June 1869, there were some very strange goings-on at the 'Feathers' Hotel, situated in London Road, in the middle of central Manchester. For six weeks, there were regular ghostly disturbances, reported both by the guests and the hotel staff: dismal groans were heard at night, as well as the sound of ghostly footsteps, and above all the ringing of all the bells in the hotel. When the weary waiters went to sleep, they were disturbed sometimes by a solitary tinkle, sometimes by a loud peal of all the hotel's 14 bells.

After a few weeks of this torment, ghost hysteria broke out: the hotel staff became convinced the place was haunted, and some of them were reduced to nervous wrecks, losing much sleep waiting for the next ghostly tinkle. Some nights, they kept a strict watch for many hours, without any spooky sounds or other manifestations of the ghost; but as soon as the tired waiters, pot-boys and kitchenmaids went to bed, the bells started to ring again.

At first, the landlord of the 'Feathers' pooh-poohed the idea of his hotel being haunted, but after the ghost hysteria had spread like wildfire among all members of his staff, he called in a reputable firm of bell-hangers. They rearranged the wires and muffled the bells, assuring the landlord that the problem was solved. And for a while, it seemed as if the Manchester Ghost had been laid: for six nights after the repairs, the tired, nervous domestics enjoyed the uncommon luxury of a full night's sleep.

But the mischievous spectre was soon up to its old tricks again: the bells kept ringing throughout the night at regular intervals and the long-suffering landlord finally called in the police. A 'special detective' was stationed at the hotel, and this Victorian ghostbuster had assistance from several uniformed constables. They thought it very queer that a ghost would haunt a major hotel in one of the busiest streets in central Manchester, right opposite the London Road Station (today Manchester Piccadilly). Late one evening, one of these policemen, and two boys, heard spooky noises from the hotel's top floor. When they went up to investigate, they saw what they called "an indescribable presence" on the top of the stairs: two days later, they were still in a state of nervous prostration, and unable to give any account of the sinister spectre's appearance and disappearance.

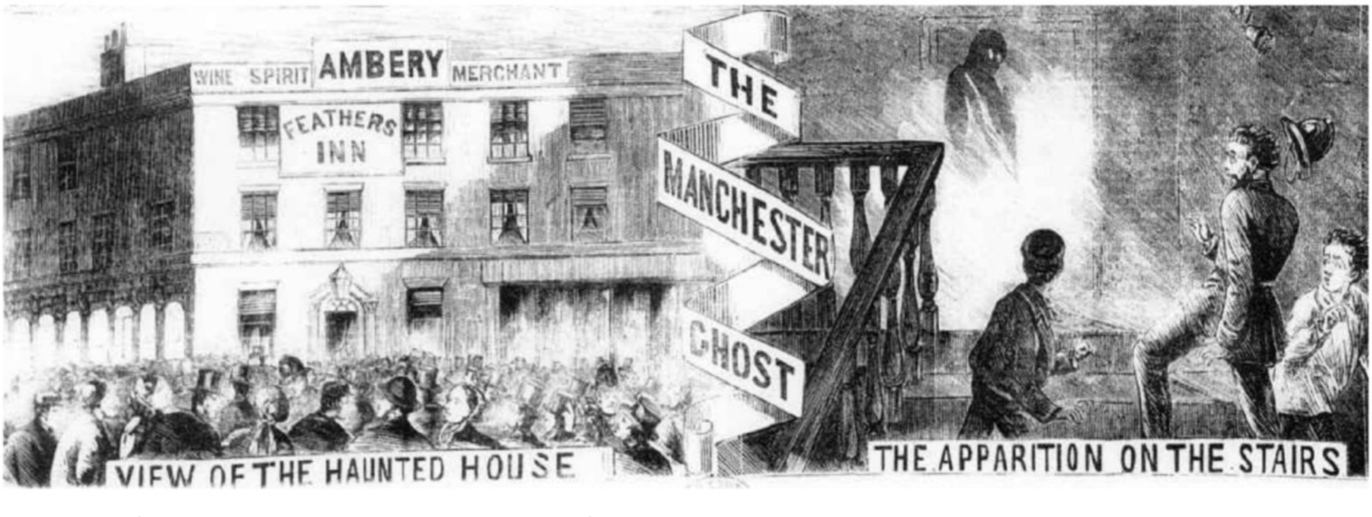
The ringing of the bells went on for several more weeks, testing the already severely jarred nerves of the 'Feathers' domestics. The cook resigned her comfortable position, preferring poverty to being under the same roof as the Manchester Ghost. Later, there was a newspaper report that she had suffered a dangerous nervous collapse, and was in bed seriously ill.

By mid-June, the hotel was nightly crowded by hundreds of people, excited by curiosity about the ghost and thirsty for information about the spectre. They were also thirsty for beer, wine and spirits, to the great profit of the landlord, who was said to welcome his singular guest and hope that the ghost was in for a long stay at his hotel. Hundreds of people also thronged the streets and lanes outside the hotel, anxious to hear the latest news, and to see the ghost or hear the bells ring. Quite a force of detectives and police constables was investigating the mystery.

"Whatever else may be thought of it, this revival of the Cock Lane spirit has been and continues most successful as a sensation in drawing crowded houses", was how the *Illustrated Police News* somewhat laboriously summarised the progress of the Manchester ghost hunt. The ending of the story is unfortunately not recorded, neither in the *IPN*, nor in any local newspaper. Thus, the identity of the ghostly figure in the stairway remains a mystery, as does the persistent ringing of the bells.

In some other Victorian poltergeist cases involving a similar ringing of bells and ghostly bumps in the night, the culprit was found to be some mischievous domestic who wanted to frighten his or her colleagues. Perhaps, in this particular case, the landlord himself, or some accomplice, might also be among the suspects, since he was the only person actually making a profit from the ghost story.

The 'Feathers' Hotel was a relatively old building, operating under the same name at least since 1850. With time, it acquired quite a bad reputation, and seems to have housed a low clientele. According to the *Manchester Times* of 12 September 1885, the magistrates declined to renew the license of the landlord of the 'Feathers' to keep a public house, since he had been convicted of harbouring women of ill-fame. There is no mention of the tavern operating under its original name subsequent to that calamity, and the building is no longer standing today.


WINE SPIRIT AMBERY MERCHANT
FEATHERS INN
THE MANCHESTER GHOST
VIEW OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE
THE APPARITION ON THE STAIRS

ABOVE: To the left, the haunted hotel; to the right, the Manchester Ghost frightening the police constable and the two boys. From the *IPN*, 12 June 1869.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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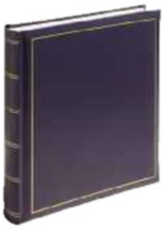

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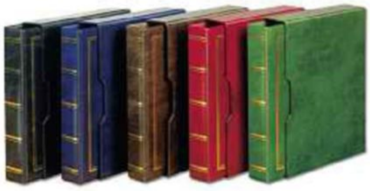

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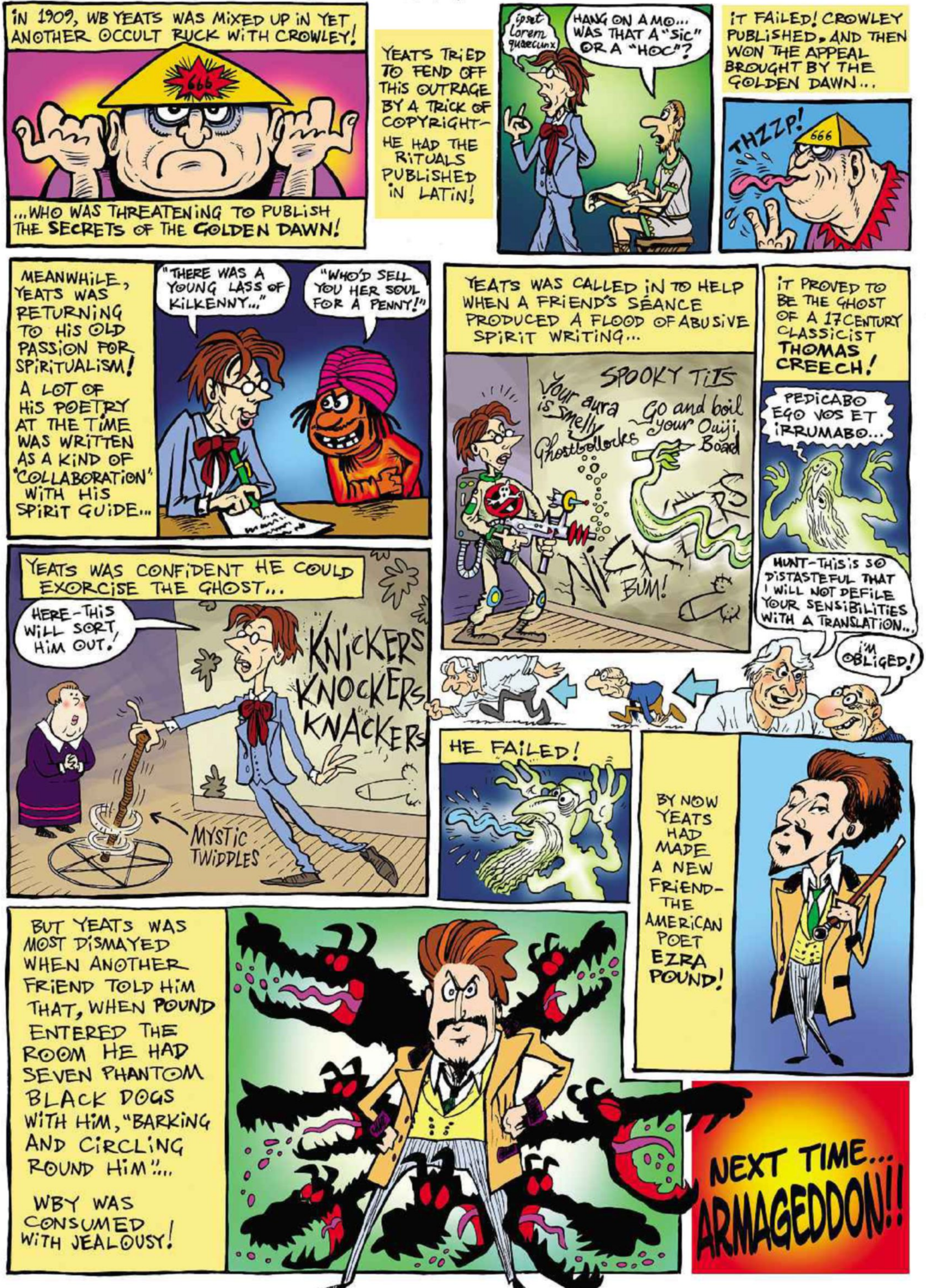
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666
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ipset lorem quaecunx
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IT FAILED! CROWLEY PUBLISHED, AND THEN WON THE APPEAL BROUGHT BY THE GOLDEN DAWN...
THZZP!
666
MEANWHILE, YEATS WAS RETURNING TO HIS OLD PASSION FOR SPIRITUALISM! A LOT OF HIS POETRY AT THE TIME WAS WRITTEN AS A KIND OF "COLLABORATION" WITH HIS SPIRIT GUIDE...
"THERE WAS A YOUNG LASS OF KILKENNY..."
"WHO'D SELL YOU HER SOUL FOR A PENNY!"
YEATS WAS CALLED IN TO HELP WHEN A FRIEND'S SÉANCE PRODUCED A FLOOD OF ABUSIVE SPIRIT WRITING...
SPOOKY TITS
Your aura is smelly
Go and boil your Ouiji Board
Ghostbollocks
BUM!
IT PROVED TO BE THE GHOST OF A 17 CENTURY CLASSICIST THOMAS CREECH!
PEDICABO EGO VOS ET IRRUMABO...
HUNT-THIS IS SO DISTASTEFUL THAT I WILL NOT DEFILE YOUR SENSIBILITIES WITH A TRANSLATION...
I'M OBLIGED!
YEATS WAS CONFIDENT HE COULD EXORCISE THE GHOST...
HERE-THIS WILL SORT HIM OUT!
KNICKERS KNOCKERS KNACKERS
MYSTIC TWIDDLES
HE FAILED!
BY NOW YEATS HAD MADE A NEW FRIEND- THE AMERICAN POET EZRA POUND!
BUT YEATS WAS MOST DISMAYED WHEN ANOTHER FRIEND TOLD HIM THAT, WHEN POUND ENTERED THE ROOM HE HAD SEVEN PHANTOM BLACK DOGS WITH HIM, "BARKING AND CIRCLING ROUND HIM"...
WBY WAS CONSUMED WITH JEALOUSY!
NEXT TIME... ARMAGEDDON!!

The PRANA Talisman

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How does **PRANA** work? The way traditional magic has always worked!...

With very little time and effort, the Prana Talisman can provide its owner with the inner power to achieve any positive goals that they wish, however ambitious! Centuries of wisdom, knowledge and practice have percolated down from the scholars and mystics of the ancient world, and now their legacy can be revealed and offered to you, in the form of the Prana.

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. . I think that Prana talisman is working as I have been creating and drawing nonstop and with new confidence. . .
unbelievable. . .
Ms DN, London

Hey… I just wanted to let you know that the talisman is amazing! Thank you! Since I had it, work has been coming in, I feel great and everything seems to be getting better!
Ms NJ, Leicester

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The PRANA Talisman

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PRANA - the Talisman of the Elements, the Breath of Life and the Four Archangels.

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PRANA
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Turn your Dreams into Reality
with the Power of Magic and your Mind
Quick & Easy Instructions for Using your Prana

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VIDEO

A MONTH TO DIE FOR
WITH KILLER RELEASES THIS MARCH

Meiko Kaji in
Teruo Ishii's
BLIND WOMAN'S CURSE
怪談昇
The Stuff
CRASH-O-RAMA
RAW GUTS FOR GLORY!
FLESH AGAINST STEEL!
JACK HILL'S
PIT STOP
A DONALD CAMMELL FILM
WHITE OF THE EYE
WHITE OF THE EYE

This month, a killer quartet of Blu-ray world premieres! Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye* (available in both Blu-ray and Limited SteelBook™ editions) appears in a stunning 2K restoration, whilst homicidal pudding threatens to take over the world in *The Stuff*! Japanese cult star Meiko Kaji (*Lady Snowblood*) returns to kick ass in *Blind Woman's Curse* and Sid Haig and director Jack Hill (*Spider Baby*) team up once again for car crashes galore in *Pit Stop*.

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